

A NEST OF HATE

Barlow Bridge was one of those sleepy northern villages that 'progress' and the modern world had somehow managed to by-pass. Only the derelict iron works and mine-shafts remained as relics of a past that had once been prosperous. Here in this village lived Dan Cartwright. Clumsy, oafish, a pathetic victim of an illness that had left him mentally retarded, Dan was, despite his uncouthness, strangely harmless and gentle. His experience and knowledge of the world was confined within the limits of the village school, the row of small terraced houses where he lived and the wide rolling moors. And in the pub each day, ordering his sixpenny glass of mild, Dan was a familiar sight. Serving behind the bar was Jenny Greenhouse, the girl who had gone away to London in search of fame amid the bright lights, only to return four years later with a child, to set the village gossiping and reawaken memories and desires in the man she deserted who thought his love for her was long since dead. With her return began a series of events in which Dan, helpless and uncomprehending, found himself the focal point, and suddenly into his quiet, secure world broke terrifying, malicious forces that were to have on him, as on others in the village, lasting and irreparable effects.

Jim Andrew with this, his first novel, shows a sensitive and perceptive insight into human character in a book that alternately moves and shocks as he describes the tragedy of a gentle nature destroyed by violence.

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I

DAN STEPPED gently out of the house, away from the strident blaring sound of the record player.

Softly, carefully, he raised the wooden latch and pulled the door to behind him; careful not to make a noise that would disturb his sister while she was playing her gram. It was always the same on his sister's half day. She'd come home from the shop in Rutlidge where she worked, throw her green overall with the embroidered badge onto a chair, and on would go her gram; if Dan so much as twitched an eyelid, she would start on him.

Huge, slow and stolid, he peered up and down, his eyes large and liquid beneath the thick black brows that garnished the monotonous expanse of his pale vacant face. He pursed his lips slightly and, putting his head on one side to make himself feel like a bird, he strode up the three steps that led from the diminutive green atoll of a garden, with its stunted privets, up to the rough cobbled village street.

The street that had retained its character for over a hundred years. Laid down when the mines were active, and the iron works was still functioning. Before the days of cars and buses, when the valley rumbled with the sound of machinery and activity, a symphony of crashing steam-hammers, throbbing pistons, clattering engines and hissing steam. When the workmen used to pour into the valley every morning on the early trains from Rutlidge. Now the coal seams were no longer worth working, the mines were abandoned and the ironworks shut up, and there was no need to relay the old cobbled surface to cope with the modern traffic that would never come to Barlow Bridge.

Barlow Bridge, nestling in the deep valley, cherishing its derelict factories, its empty mines, its old brick empty school, its corrugated tin chapel, and the little stone houses, where a few people like Dan's family still lived, getting the train in the morning to go to work in Rutledge. So the street remained the same, its worn cobbles black and shiny, polished by clog irons on thousands of hurrying feet until they were as smooth as cannonballs, forming a black polka dot pattern between the mossy nicks.

Dan paused by the gate for a moment and then turned left to where the street became a lane that wound up out of the valley, past the new housing estate at Barlowmoor, to the bus terminal and the pub. The pub where all the men would be, and Dan could walk in and push his belly against the bar and say: 'Glass of mild, landlord,' throwing the sixpence that his mother had given him down on the bar. Just like that: 'Glass of mild, landlord,' same way the men said it—casual. And all the men would say: 'Morning Dan—how are you then Dan—how's your Mum, Dan—your Dad still getting a full week in Dan then?' And he'd nod and feel a bit embarrassed at all the attention, but very comfortable inside because they were all so friendly, and he'd say: 'All right, they're all all right.'

Dan liked going to the pub and being there with the men. The men big and red and full of laughter. Freshly washed after the morning shift, exchanging banter in loud voices over their games of crib and darts. Sometimes one of them would suggest that Dan threw a dart. 'Here Dan,' somebody would say, 'throw a dart with you for a drink.' He would refuse at first, because he knew that he didn't have another sixpence, and he wouldn't be able to pay for the drink if he lost. But they would insist. 'Come on Danny boy, be a sport, have a do,' they'd all urge. 'You've never lost yet, and the drink 'ud allus do tomorrow.' So at last Dan would say: 'All right.' And they'd put a dart in his hand, and laugh and wink at each other, as he stepped forward to aim; very carefully, biting his tongue to help

him concentrate. 'Come on Dan,' they'd say. 'A fellow your size can nearly reach forward and put it in.' But he wouldn't be hurried, and they'd nudge each other with their elbows, and laugh louder than ever, until at last he threw the dart; and it would strike the wooden, log-end board with a satisfying plonk. Then the other fellow would always miss the board altogether, and they'd laugh again and say how he ought to get glasses. 'My foot must have slipped,' the man would say as he gave Dan the glass of mild; but everyone would say no, say as how nobody'd ever beat Dan. 'He puts the hoodoo on you,' they'd say.

Most lunchtimes Dan would go round to the pub. About twelve o'clock his mum would say: 'Here you are then our Dan, let's see what's in my purse.' And she'd take out a sixpence and give it to him. 'Here you are, now you get round to the Stag and have a drink with Bert Tatlers. Gi' me a chance to get me work done, and cook your dinner for you. How I can get through with a great man like you hulking about the house I don't know.' And she'd help him with his tie, and with his boot laces, and make him bend down so that she could inspect behind his ears for shaving soap, and she'd fold a clean handkerchief for his top pocket. Then when he was ready to her satisfaction she'd send him on his way. 'Get off with you now, and don't let me be seeing your face here before two o'clock. I'll have something nice waiting for you, for your bit of dinner.' The pub was all right.

Dan walked up the steep hill, past the decaying iron-works, across the old rusting railway tracks that cut the dark cobbled band of the lane; under the skeletal remains of the steel bridge that had once carried the smelted ore to the foundry. He was carrying a thick walking stick that had once belonged to his grandad, and as he walked he swung it, the way he had seen somebody in a picture that his mum had taken him to see in Rutledge once. His gait was an exaggerated caricature of a rather pompous Victorian or Edwardian gentleman's as he swaggered along. Across his

waistcoat hung a heavy silver watch chain, decorated with medallions that his grandfather had got for service on the railway and flying homing pigeons.

As the lane emerged from the sombre-sided valley that marred the fields, a great, dark, ugly scar in the green rolling Pennine foothills, Dan took his watch out. He was proud of his watch. Like the stick and the chain it had been his grandad's and there was an inscription on the back. Dan couldn't read it but he knew it by heart. 'Awarded to John P. Cartwright, for faithful service and prompt action on the night of June the twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and eight.' Dan's mother had told him the story many a time. How that night there'd been a great thunderstorm—a regular cloudburst and the canal had burst its banks, flooding the tracks down by Brook's corner, where the Leeds express was due to go along. Dan's grandad had run six miles across country, to the next signal box, to have the train diverted. There would have been a disaster if it hadn't been for Dan's grandad. All the telephone lines were down and there was no other way of getting a message. There were several pawnbrokers' inscriptions on the watch too—the old man had lived through lean days, and although a railwayman's work was steady the pay had never been very high—but Dan didn't know that and wouldn't have understood if he did. Dan's grandad had been a lay preacher in the Baptist church—Dan had been to see his grave once, in the little cemetery. John the Baptist, Dan used to call him. 'My grandad's John the Baptist,' he would say.

Dan looked at the ornate face of the watch with its three blue-steel fingers, the big finger that measured the minutes, the little one that said what hour it was, and the very little one that had a tiny dial of its own and that he could see going round. He read the time with difficulty, only able to understand the figures from their position on the dial. He'd memorized them, starting near the top—that was one and then they went right round to twelve, back at the top

again. The big finger was pointing straight down—half past. The little one was between the twelve and the one. Dan remembered that it had been quarter past twelve when he left home and he hadn't been out long. It must be half past twelve, he decided. He said it aloud to himself: 'Half past twelve,' and then the way the man on the wireless said it: 'Twelve-thirty.' Dan was very proud that he could say the time the way the man did on the wireless; his brother had once taught him how. Dan put his watch back in his pocket and walked on, making bird noises through his pursed lips, rattling his stick against the fence, and swiping with it at the dock leaves.

At the very top of the hill, he came to the Goose Pond. Green and stagnant, no one could ever remember there being any geese there, but it was always called the Goose Pond. There were newts in the muddy pond though, small black wriggly things with orange striped bellies like old time, music hall, cavalry soldiers; newts that swam like tiddlers, but Dan liked them better than tiddlers because they walked as well, and if you put them in a jar with a bit of wood floating, they'd climb on it and sail. But Dan didn't catch things and put them in jars any more. Once he had got some tadpoles and tried to grow them into frogs. He'd made a little fishing net out of twisted wire and the foot of one of his mother's old stockings, fastened to the end of a stick that he cut in Hall Wood. Then he'd begged a big empty sweet jar off Molly at the shop, next door to where he lived and gone to the Goose Pond. He'd soon caught lots of tadpoles, and filling the jar from the pond—for fear tap water would poison them, he'd put them in with a bit of duckweed and a bullrush, and taken them carefully home, where he put them in the sun and fed them on bread-crumbs. After a week or two the tadpoles had started to develop tiny legs, budding from their globulous, brown-grey bodies, and their feathery, flicking tails were becoming smaller. But one morning he went to look at them and found that they were all dead. Dan had decided that it must

be because they were homesick for the pond, and after that he never caught things and put them in jars any more. He still used to go to the pond and look at the tadpoles though—tadders he called them—and at the frogs, smooth and green with enormous bulging eyes. Sometimes he would catch a frog and hold it in his hand for a while, very gently, careful not to squeeze the soft body too hard, but he would always put the frog back just where he had found it, afterwards.

There should be tadpoles in the pond now, and on his way back he would climb over the fence and have a look. It wouldn't matter then if he got his boots muddied, but he liked to be spruce when he went in the pub.

Soon after passing the Goose Pond, the lane wound by the end of Forty Row, a hamlet of forty houses which stretched in a single block overlooking the valley and then became a street on the new estate that, spawned by Rutledge, was fast spreading in its red-bricked, tidy way, towards Barlow Bridge.

Dan could remember when there had been no estate, and where the impersonal, sapling-lined streets were now, had all been open fields, belonging to Morgan's farm. Dan used to go there to watch the haymaking, sometimes helping with the work and getting paid with coins out of old Morgan's tatty leather purse that opened like a concertina. Then he would run home with the money held tight in his hot hand to give to his mother, and that night when his father had come home and finished his tea, she would say: 'Our Dan brought a pay packet home today,' and show him. And his father would say: 'Has he now! Then you'd best be giving him a bit of odd-money back lass, hadn't you? A chap wants summat for his pocket.' And his mother would give him some money—oddie, just the same as his father got on Friday nights. Often it would be more than the few shillings that Dan had got off old Morgan, but Dan didn't know that, and he'd have it in his trousers' pocket and jingle it, and maybe buy something with it—like a mouth organ,

or perhaps a brightly coloured toy from Molly's shop—a boat or a wind-up motor.

Since the estate had been built, there was no more hay-making, all the fields were covered with streets and houses. Morgan's farm was a farm no longer. Once it had been an exciting place with lots of animals—cows, pigs and horses, not to mention the birds—hens, ducks, geese and turkeys and Dan had always been allowed to wander freely round the farmyard, could go and look at them whenever he wanted. Now the animals were gone and the buildings had been converted to a grocery store to serve the people on the estate. The old stone barn had been rebuilt, with large plate glass windows to show off the rows and rows of canned goods in brightly labelled tins and the fresh fruit and greens and vegetables, ready weighed out and wrapped, in polythene bags.

But Dan didn't mind the estate coming where the farm had been. The estate was an exciting place, seething with activity. There was always something going on there, people to watch—friendly, kindly people who always had a word or two for Dan. They were forever outside their neat, semi-detached houses with the ginnels between; busy digging their gardens, polishing the second-hand cars that they were buying on the never-never, or just lounging and gossiping; the men in their shirt sleeves, rolled past the elbow; the women in print cotton dresses and worn carpet slippers, their hair put up in pins under their brightly coloured headscarves.

They all knew Dan, and sometimes he would meet their children playing in the fields over towards Barlow Bridge. They used to let him join in their games of whip, ducky-ducky, rally-oh and cowboys and Indians. Samson, the estate children used to call him, because he was so big and strong, and they called his grandfather ~~to~~ watch Big Ben. 'What does Big Ben say Samson?' they would ask him, and he'd tell them the time the wireless way. The children used to frighten him sometimes. They would say things that he

didn't understand, make signs at him with their fingers and laugh at him. They could be cruel and vicious too. When they found birds' nests, they took the eggs away, just for the satisfaction of smashing them later, and they would shoot at birds and the big green frogs even, with airguns and catapults.

Dan had one particular friend off the estate—Johnny Starter. Johnny Starter was different from the other boys on the estate, he used to like just to watch the animals and birds; he never disturbed them, or took eggs away. Johnny was eleven years old and went to the big grammar school in Rutledge. He and Dan used to go for long country walks. 'Safaris' Johnny called them. On these walks Dan would show Johnny nests that he had found, and Johnny would make notes and maybe sketches in his exercise book with Dan watching over his shoulder and he would tell Dan what sort of bird had built the nest. There wasn't much about birds and animals that Johnny didn't know. At home he had some stick insects from Africa, just like twigs in a big glass box. And he had a microscope too. He had let Dan look through his microscope. Sometimes he would get a jar of water from the Goose Pond, and tell Dan that there were water-fleas in it. Dan could never see anything there at first, but later when Johnny showed him through the microscope, he saw them, curled up, transparent creatures, with long whiskers like shrimps. The first time, Dan had wanted to take them back afterwards, in case they died like the tadpoles. But Johnny said that they needn't bother, that water fleas were different from tadpoles, that they could live anywhere as long as there was water and if they put them in the little pond in his own back-garden they would be all right. There were lots of other minute creatures that Johnny found, and that Dan could only see through the microscope. All these went in the pond in the back-garden too.

There wasn't much about birds and animals that Johnny didn't know, but he couldn't find them the way that Dan

could, and on Saturdays, and even weekdays during the school holidays, he would call round for Dan early in the morning, with his exercise books, specimen jars and sandwiches and a thermos of tea in a haversack over his shoulder. 'We'll go on safari,' he would say, and Dan's mother would make him some butties up too, and they would go off for the whole day. Sometimes they would go right over Robby's Monument and onto the moors, purple with heather, and deserted except for themselves and the occasional hiker or rock climber. They had found caves on the moors and sometimes Johnny talked of running away and living in them in case 'they' dropped the bomb.

On these trips, Johnny would call Dan his Basuto guide, and his walking stick a knobkerrie. Sometimes they walked so far that Johnny's short legs got tired, and Dan would carry him piggy-back, Johnny telling him which way to go from his big map and Dan would sing a Zulu song that Johnny had taught him:

*'Gin gan gulla, gulla, gulla, gulla watwah,
Gin gan goo, gin gan goo. . . .'*

When they got home again they would go to Johnny's for supper and look through his microscope. Then Dan would go to his own house and tell his mother all about what they had done and seen on the moors, and she would fill the washing-up bowl with steaming hot water, for him to wash his feet that were blackened by the moorland peat which always managed to find its way into his boots.

At the end of the estate, where the lane joined the main road into Rutledge, Dan came to the bus terminal and the wooden bench where the old men always sat, except when it was raining when they would stand in the bus shelter. They were sitting on the bench now, sitting in a row; static, their faces white, the old flesh almost transparent, seeming about to crumble from the ancient bone beneath. Only their eyes were alive, keen and dancing in the dark and wrinkled pits, and their hands, twitching aimlessly in their

laps, as if in protest at their own infirmity. The same old men had always been there years before, when the hay used to be made. Leaning on the fence, savouring the sweet scent of the dried grasses, with their hairy nostrils, set-in noses, huge and swollen by many years of too enthusiastic blowing. Now the fields and fence were gone, but they had the bench instead. The green-painted bench with its little brass plaque: 'This bench is placed here by the members of the Rutledge Christian Women's Union, for the use of old age pensioners; to commemorate the visit of the Earl of Battersby to Barlowmoor Estate, 7th April 1958.' And instead of the haymaking, they had the buses to watch. The great red, double-decker buses with their brash, singing, joking conductors and their stolid, pipe-smoking drivers, very military in their navy-blue uniforms with red piping, and with the wire in the crowns of their peaked caps bent up, so that they looked like Nazi officers. The buses arrived every eight minutes—during peak periods in convoys of several at a time—to take the people of the estate into town, the men to work, the women to the markets. Down the road they would come, swaying from side to side, noisy and smelling of diesel oil, swinging recklessly into the lane and then back round to face the town again. Ready to return, when the driver had had a puff or two of his pipe, and the conductor had finished the stub of cigarette that he invariably produced from behind his ear. The old men used to watch the buses with envy, their eyes bright. Just the same way that they used to watch Dan when he was haymaking, red, sweaty and itchy with the hay that had crept under his shirt-neck. They watched enviously, as if they wanted to join in, feel once more that they belonged and were not useless bystanders to the younger world's activity.

They nodded to Dan as he walked past them, and across the road to the pub.

The bell over the door tinkled merrily as it closed behind

Dan and he turned into the public bar. Cheerful and cosy with its scrubbed white, wood-topped tables, fascinating figures incorporated in the design of their wrought-iron legs, Britannia, Justice blindfolded, and mermaids with scaly metal tails. The bar, crammed with gleaming glassware, polished brass and rows of spirit bottles, hanging upside down, each with its own optic measure and tiny chromium tap. The wax flowers and the fish tank, glowing green, with plastic sea horses tethered to the sandy bottom, and the scintillating, tropical fish darting in and out of the miniature castles, the coral and the spiny shells.

‘Morning Dan,’ said Bert Tatlers, the landlord. Dan was a bit earlier than usual. The morning shift still hadn’t come off and there was nobody else in the pub. ‘You’ll be having the same as usual?’ The landlord reached for a clean glass and waited expectantly by the beer-engine, one plump hand poised on the mild pump.

Dan fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and brought out his sixpence; he put it down on the scarred, stained bar top.

‘Glass of mild please,’ he said. He pushed the sixpence towards the landlord, with one finger.

‘Right you are then Dan lad.’ The landlord set to pumping furiously. His eyes were very blue and cheerful, in his sanguine, high-coloured face. ‘Lovely glass of mild this. Best glass of mild in Rutledge. Like cream that top. New barrel I’ve just laid on this morning.’ He pushed Dan’s tanner back across the bar. ‘Here, you have this with me, as you’re t’ first in this morning. . . . And I think I’ll just join you.’ He picked up a second glass and filled it for himself.

‘Cheers,’ he said, ‘down the hatch.’ He wiped his nicotine-stained, greying moustache with the back of his hand, and pumped himself another, holding the glass up to the light, and gazing at the amber liquid with evident self-satisfaction, before taking a drink.

Dan took a tiny sip of his own mild, hardly taking the

top off, because he wanted to make it last. 'Like cream,' he repeated shyly.

Dan stood there, leaning against the counter, while the landlord busied himself behind the bar, polishing glasses, fussing over the display of bottles on the shelves, setting the beer mats out on the counter with great precision; getting ready for the rush when the morning shift came off at the pit, just down the road towards Rutledge. Bert Tatlers felt good this morning. He'd had a big win at the dog track the night before, and he felt good; felt top of the first division. He remembered how much Dan liked watching the fish being fed, and he took the small, yellow tin of food from its place beside the cash register.

'Here we are Dan, better be giving the fish a bit of summat too, eh?' He walked down the bar to where the fish tank was.

'Oh yer.' Dan picked up his glass of mild, holding it carefully in both hands so as to keep it steady and not spill any. He followed the landlord down his own side of the bar, setting the glass back down on the counter, and waiting expectantly, watching.

The landlord dragged up a beer crate and stood on it so that he could reach. He prised the lid off the tin, and dropped a pinch of the food into the top of the tank. The fish swarmed after it, flashing red and gold and silver, luminous in the green water, darting and snatching at the specks of food.

'Look at 'um go,' Dan said. He jumped up and down, tapping with his stick against the counter.

'Certainly can shift when they've got a mind to, can't they?' Bert Tatlers clambered down from the crate, and stepped back. He leaned on the other side of the bar, opposite Dan; resting on one elbow, holding the fish-food loosely in one hand, watching the fish, which were now scavenging at the bottom of the tank. The fish raised clouds of sand, looking for stray particles of food that might have

sunk past them. 'Here,' he said, 'Would you like to be giving them some?'

'Who me?' Dan asked incredulously. 'Me feed 'um?'

'Certainly.' The landlord nodded his head and held out the tin of fish food.

'Yer mean like I could come round that side and put it in?' Dan rubbed his fleshy chin. 'Drop the food in like?' He spoke slowly, fumbling for the right words.

'Sure, why not? Come on, all that you have to do is just drop it in the top, then watch them go.'

Bert Tatlers lifted up the hinged part of the bar to let Dan through, and gave him the tin of food: 'Just take a pinch in your thumb and finger and put it through that hole in the wood on top.'

Dan stepped slowly up to the fish tank, breathing very heavily, and biting his tongue, the way he did when he threw darts. Dan didn't need to stand on the beer crate to reach the top of the tank, and he carefully shook out some of the food. The fish, which were now lurking torpid at the bottom, quickly came to life again, chasing the particles of food, as they slowly sank. Dan clapped his hands in excitement as he watched the colourful display of aquabatics, spilling some of the fish food on the floor.

'Here, watch what you're doing.' Bert Tatlers took the little yellow tin back into his ringed, stumpy hand, with the fuzz of curly ginger hairs on the back. 'Don't go sawdusting the bar with it.'

'You got a new barman then Bert?' A cheery, middling-young man in a white overall had come into the pub, and was leaning against the bar over near the door. Bert Tatlers had been so busy rescuing his precious fish-food before it all got spilt that he hadn't heard the tinkle of the bell.

'Eh, howdo Harry.' The landlord turned to serve him. 'Feeding time at the zoo eh? He'll be taming lions next will our Dan. Won't you Dan?'

Dan giggled, feeling a bit embarrassed. He backed out

of the bar and, picking up his drink, he retreated into a corner where he felt he would be less noticeable.

‘Bitter Harry?’

‘Pint please.’ Harry dropped one and fourpence on the counter.

‘I’m ready for this too,’ he said when Bert Tatlers handed him the pint. ‘Been delivering all morning—Dad’s laid up with his varicose veins again. I keep telling him to have them out, but you know what he is, won’t go into hospital.’

Harry Morgan it was. Old Morgan’s son. Before the estate was built over the farm land, he used to milk the cows and go round with his father in the horse-drawn milk float, filling people’s jugs from the big silver-grey churns. Now that the farm was a store, he worked behind the counter, serving the hygienically wrapped food; or when his father was bad, making the deliveries, and picking up the laundry, like he had been doing this morning; driving round the estate in the smart, cream and green van. His fresh, freckled, outdoor face didn’t look right over the white overall, with the top pocket full of efficient-looking pencils and ball-point pens. He was better suited to the Scotch-plaid shirts and the faded, blue denim, over-all trousers that he used to wear, tucked into the tops of his clarty wellington boots.

‘Haven’t been seeing so much of you this last week Harry,’ Bert Tatlers said.

‘Well I’ve been kept pretty busy with Dad being down you know,’ Harry replied. ‘Out with the van all day, and then having to get things fixed up at the shop every night, ready for the next morning. Check the stock, arrange the shelves and all that.’

‘Aye you’ll be kept at it for sure, being on your own. How long has the old man been bad?’

‘Since Sunday; he should be all right in a couple of days—soon as his legs have had a bit of a rest. It’s not so bad you know. I can get along all right, with Mrs Bolton coming in and doing for us and all, but it don’t leave me much time to get out of a night.’ Harry handed his empty pot

across the bar. 'Here, give us another pint will you Bert?'

The landlord re-filled Harry's pot: 'One pint of apple fritter coming up, one big titter, that'll be one shilling and fourpence to you Harry.'

'Have one yourself?' Harry asked.

'Don't mind if I do. It's a poor landlord that can't sup his own ale. I'll have a glass of mild beer if it's all the same to you—that'll make it one-nine-half, you can have it at staff price when I have one. Special discount for cash.'

Harry dropped a two-shilling piece onto the bar. The landlord dropped it in the open till and took twopence half-penny change out of the square wooden box of coppers beside it.

'Stick it in for the blind, will you Bert,' Harry said. 'Cheers.'

'All the best Harry.' He put the coppers in the gauze sock that hung beside the bar.

'Here Bert, who's this smart bit of stuff I hear that you got behind the bar nowadays?' Harry Morgan winked over his pint of bitter. 'Talk of the estate she is, they're all on about her. Tommy Winterbottom said that she were like a film star pumping the beer.'

'Oh aye, she's a bit of all right, young Jenny is; clever girl too—she can't half reckon up the change, quick as anything.' The landlord took another drink of his beer. 'I bet that you'll know her, she's been away for a bit, but she comes from over your way. Lives with her mother over on t' Forty Row.'

'Not Jenny Greenhouse.'

'That's her, I thought that you'd know her. Nobody would forget a girl like that in a hurry.'

'She went away four years ago.' Harry put his pot down and lit a cigarette. 'I thought that she would be married or something by now.'

'Don't know about that, but she's brought a nipper back with her. What she was like before she went away I don't

know, but she's a lovely smart-looking girl now. All dressed up in the latest fashion. You know, them stiletto heels and such, hair piled up in one of they fancy styles on top of her head, and beautiful clothes she has. Here Harry, are *you with me?*'

Harry jumped and looked at the landlord: 'Sorry Bert, I was just thinking about something. Got a kid you say?'

'That's right, a little toddler, didn't see no sign of a wedding ring though.'

'Maybe she's just been having a bit over the brush tail.' Harry laughed, but the laughter sounded a bit forced.

'Sh!' the landlord put his fingers to his lips and pointed to Dan, sitting quiet, listening in the corner. It didn't seem right to talk like that in front of Dan somehow. Like you wouldn't in front of a kid. 'Any road she makes a good enough barmaid—don't half brighten the old pub up. I reckon she'll want to make a bit of something, her with the kid and all, and I don't expect a girl like that would want to go in the factory.'

'No, I don't suppose that she would,' Harry agreed. He finished off his pint and turned to go.

'Are you having one with me before you're off Harry, one for the road like?'

'Not just now thank you Bert. With it being early closing day I want to get back to the shop early. If I can get things done this afternoon it'll give me a chance to get out for one or two tonight.'

'Might be seeing you later then.'

'With a bit of luck. Cheerio Bert.'

Harry Morgan walked out of the pub and across the strip of pavement to his waiting van.

Jenny back and with a child! He thought about Jenny. Warm, lively Jenny, as he had known her four years before, her thick dark hair hanging over her pale, beautiful forehead. A smile creased his freckled face. She was forever sweeping her hair back, out of her deep blue eyes that used to be moist with laughter as she came running to meet him.

How she used to throw herself into his arms always. So desperately, as if they had been parted for years, although often they might have seen each other only a few hours before. He knew that he hadn't been the only one, that *there had been others before him, when she used to go out dancing in Rutledge at nights—she had started going out to the dance-halls in Rutledge when she was barely fifteen, wearing make-up and high heels, but then she had always been more advanced than other girls somehow, even at school, more reserved and mature in a way.*

He knew he hadn't been the only one, or the first, but he hadn't minded, he had always hoped that there was something special between them. But she had tired of him. She had started making excuses not to meet him so often, said that she had to stay in with her mother, wash her hair—anything, but underneath he had known that she had started going into Rutledge again. Gradually they had seen less and less of each other, even though she had been every bit as passionate at their meetings.

Then one day she had told him that she was going to London. It had been one afternoon, they had made love in Hall Wood, and afterwards he had asked her when he would see her again. She had replied that she didn't know, that she was sick of the village and the mill at Rutledge, that she had got a job doing office work in London and was going the next day.

Harry had been very broken up about it at the time. He laughed to himself as he remembered how he used to go for walks, back to all the places that they had been to together. Half hoping, he supposed, that by some miracle, she might be there. He'd got over her now of course.

Harry started up his van. Funny about the child. Bert Tatlers hadn't said a baby, he'd said a toddler—the nipper must be getting on a bit for him to say that. It would be interesting to see Jenny again. Harry slipped the engine into gear, and drove off, back down the lane which Dan had walked up, back towards the shop.

In the pub Dan was still sitting in the corner, comfortable and contented, looking down at his glass of beer, and still clutching the sixpence that Bert Tatlers had given him back. He'd be able to have another glass of mild when this was done.

The pub was beginning to fill up now as the first men from the morning shift started to filter in. Years before they used to arrive grimy, with the coal-dust ringing their tired eyes, strained by the long hours in semi-darkness underground. Now they were clean and glowing, their skin pink, freshly scrubbed at the pit baths, and instead of soiled working clothes, they were changed into their second best suits, pin striped and bird's eye patterned, over the thick flannel shirts that they wore without collars, their bright, silk ties fastened round the bare corrugated skin of their thick necks.

Soon the inevitable games of cards, darts and dominoes started and Dan sat, happy on his wooden stool, listening to the calls and the banter.

'YOU SHOULDN'T go on at our Dan like that.' Mrs Cartwright carried her knitting into the sitting-room and sat down beside her daughter on the big, brown, morocco-covered sofa. She lifted the drowsy, unresisting, black cat onto her lap and shifted her large backside about, adjusting herself until she was comfortable on the lumpy seat, with its hollows and protruding springs. 'I don't know why you have to be forever picking on him so.'

'Our Dan, our Dan!' Betty Cartwright mimicked. She selected a gramophone record, and pulled the disc out of its shiny art-paper sleeve. 'I'm sick of hearing about our Dan. It's my half day off isn't it? And he's at home all the time. Surely on my one afternoon I can play my records without having to put up with him blundering about.'

'Why he's as quiet as a mouse,' Mrs Cartwright looked up from the knitting, 'and it would take more than a troop of soldiers to drown the noise of your gram I'm sure. All that 'Rocky Boogie', it rocks this house all right. Sometimes I think it will rock it clean off its foundations, it makes a greater clatter than when the ironworks was going.'

'Well I like it mother,' Betty bit her pretty lip and looked down at her carefully manicured finger-nails, 'and it's not that he drowns it exactly, it's just the way that he wanders about the room with his boots squeaking all the time—and forever clumping up and down the stairs. It's just annoying—he's like a great noisy zombie in the house; it gets you down. He should go to work or something.'

'Now you know that Dan can't go to work. You know very well. He couldn't go down the mine or in the mill could he now, all that machinery.'

'He could have gone to that special school and learnt how to do something with his hands, putting things together perhaps. A girl at the shop has a cousin just like Dan; he went to a special school and they taught him to assemble bells for bicycles. In any case he could get a job labouring somewhere, pushing and pulling things, heaven knows he's strong enough and he'd probably enjoy it. Or what about delivering at some shop, even a boy can do that.'

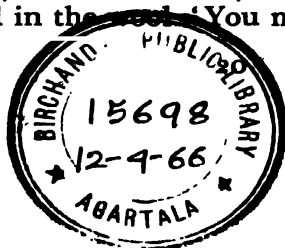
'That special school was thirty miles away,' Mrs Cartwright answered, 'and Dan would have had to live in. Me and your father weren't going to have that. We weren't going to have folk saying that he was in no home—teach him to assemble bicycle bells'—she snorted—'Hm, and as for delivering for a shop, you know that your father would never hear of it. He wouldn't have Dan fetching and carrying for people like a servant, and full well you know. Anyway Dan doesn't need to go out to work, your father's earning good money since they made him a foreman, and it doesn't take much to keep Dan, he don't want much, bless him.'

'Well it's not fair, he should do something. He should try to support himself a bit, I have to.' Betty put the record on the turntable of her player.

'Don't you go kidding yourself our Betty.' Mrs Cartwright put her knitting down beside the cat on her lap. The cat, disturbed, prodded the wool with a tentative paw. 'What you bring into this house doesn't keep you, daughter, not by a long way. There's a sight more that you get out of my purse, than what you ever put in it. All the money that you keep asking me for. Hairdos, stockings, records, and all that tutty you put on your face. I don't know what you do with it all; there isn't a day goes by without you're asking me for money for something.'

'Oh!' Betty sniffed angrily and switched on the record player, turning up the sound to its full volume.

'Oh Smoky, now see what you've done.' The cat's claws were tangled in the wool. 'You might have pulled a stitch



out.' Mrs Cartwright extracted the claw, rapped the cat gently on the head with one finger and resumed her knitting.

She shook her head. Betty couldn't really be expected to understand. She was a good girl, but she was young still and a bit thoughtless, she couldn't know about these things for years yet—until she'd got married and had children of her own.

Mrs Cartwright remembered how Dan had been born, there in the little stone-built house. It was during the depression and Fred had been very lucky to get taken on as a joiner with the council over at Rutledge. They had only been married a year, and she had been a bit afraid of having a baby. The doctor had wanted her to go into hospital, but she had refused—all her family had always had their babies at home—then when the time came it was surprisingly easy. How proud Fred had been that it was a boy; he'd been like a dog with two tails, showing little Dan off to everybody, taking him out in the big cream and chromium-plated pram that they'd had to scrape to buy. Then one day when she'd gone out to look at him, lying outside in his pram in the sun, she'd found him flushed and feverish. At first she had thought that it was just through leaving him out in the sun for too long, but when, by midnight, his temperature still hadn't dropped she had begun to worry. At last she decided to send for the doctor and Fred had got his bike out and pedalled into Rutledge. He came back about one o'clock in the morning, in the doctor's car, with his bike strapped to the luggage boot. The doctor's car had been all lop-sided because one of the springs had broken coming down the steep cobbled lane. How hot it had been on that summer night as she waited, with Fred, white and drawn, holding her hand while the doctor made his examination. It had seemed as if he would be all night, pulling back the lids to peer into the tiny brown eyes that had been so alive and watchful, but were now glazed over, vague and lost; unfastening the little

matinée jacket that she had so lovingly knitted, and exploring with his stethoscope the tiny chest; taking his temperature and holding his plump, creased baby's wrist while he sounded his pulse. At last the doctor stepped back and carefully folded his stethoscope and returned it to his black, Gladstone bag.

‘Meningitis.’

‘Oh my Lord.’ She had almost fainted. Fred had made her a cup of tea, in one of the best china cups. She remembered that she had dropped it, the fragile shell, with its painted roses, shattering on the hard stone floor. She remembered seeing the pale fluid trickling along the nicks between the flags—they couldn’t afford lino then. It had taken her a moment to pull herself together before she could ask, ‘Is there any hope?’

‘I don’t know.’ The doctor hadn’t been able to look at her face, he had just stood there, looking down, polishing his spectacles.

‘I can give you something to take the fluid away, and with careful nursing, cold packs to take the temperature down . . .’ He replaced the spectacles on his thin nose with the red lines down each side. ‘You can never really tell in these cases. I’ll call in again tomorrow.’

Careful nursing! For days she had held Dan in her arms in the dim bedroom, the curtains closed to keep out the hot sun. Fred had stayed off work, and all day long he was up and down the narrow stairs, with fresh cold water packs. Every morning the doctor had called round, and always he had the same answer to her unspoken question: ‘No change.’

How hard she had prayed during all those hot, endless, suffocating nights: ‘Please God let me keep my little baby, let me keep my child, don’t please take away my child.’

Then at last, one morning Dan fell into a quiet sleep, peaceful, no longer restless; his temperature dropped, the unhealthy flush went out of his cheeks. When the doctor arrived he was awake and hungry. The crisis was past, and

the doctor told her that Dan would live, although the meningitis might leave its after effects. He hadn't had the heart to tell her what the after effects might be, that there might be permanent damage to the brain.

It was some time before Fred and Lillian Cartwright noticed that their son was different from other children. That his quietness, his obedience and general good behaviour were not just the results of a gentle disposition, but because the meningitis had destroyed a part of his brain, so that he would never be able to concentrate for very long and never have any ambition. When the time came for him to go to school, he had proved backward, unable to learn. That was when the doctor had wanted to have him taken away to the special place. But she wouldn't hear of it. She had prayed to God for him to let her keep her child and her prayers had been answered. She had been allowed to keep her child for always. As long as he lived he would still be a child, would still remain her child, he would never grow up and leave her. Now Dan was nearly thirty and she had her two other children, Fred, twenty-five and named after his father, and young Betty who was eighteen. But Fred had gone away to Australia to make bombs, and probably young Betty would be getting married before very long, which was as it should be. Dan was still her real child, in spite of his size and age. When he was fifteen they had tried to get her to send him away again, to the special school, but ~~she~~ and Fred still wouldn't have it—putting bicycle bells together indeed! Dan's place was at home, where she could see that he got plenty of good food inside of him, and where he could get out for his walks in the country, to see the animals and the birds that he was so fond of. Some people sniggered at him, she knew, laughed at the way he carried a walking stick for instance, but what business was it of theirs if he liked to carry his grandad's stick? Those who laughed were, just showing their own ignorance, if they only knew it.

The clock struck twice. It was fifteen minutes fast—a

quarter to two—Dan would be in for his dinner before very long.

Lillian Cartwright lifted the cat off her knee and finished off her row. Then thrusting her needles into the ball of wool, she stood up and walked over to the dresser where she put her knitting in the left hand drawer. She had a bacon hot-pot cooking for Dan, plenty of potatoes and onions in a flat dish, with thick rashers of bacon on top. It was time that she put it in the oven to finish off, so that the sliced potatoes browned and the bacon baked until it was crispy and curled at the edges the way that Dan liked it. She bustled off to the kitchen, leaving Betty alone with her gramophone.

Betty yawned, slowly stretched her lithe slim body, that still hadn't quite turned into a woman's, and put another record on the turntable. She tapped her foot in accompaniment to the compelling rhythm. Her mother was so old fashioned, she thought impatiently, she lived in the past. Really, keeping Dan at home the way she did. Everybody knew that these days there were proper places for these sort of people, places where they would find them something to do. Everybody knew that those sort of people were better off when they were occupied, much happier too. Why, if they had let Dan go to that special school, he'd have been trained to do something with his hands and afterwards they would have found him a job like they did her friend's cousin. It was all right for her mother, she was past caring what people thought, but it wasn't very nice to have everyone know that Dan was your brother. People always pretended to be so nice about it, but she was sure that they talked behind her back. The smarmy way that they would stop her in the street to ask her: 'How is your poor brother dearie?'—so patronizing. And how could she bring any of her friends from Rutledge home, when Dan was likely to be slobbering around the house. What would they think? What would Robin think about Dan, or Robin's mother and father. She had wanted to bring Robin home last

Christmas—he was always saying how much he would like to meet her family—but what would he have thought about her family when he saw Dan? Wearing a funny hat, sitting on the floor, playing with his presents or eating his Christmas dinner with a spoon. It was sickening.

And at least her mother might try to keep him in the house, instead of letting him go gallivanting, wandering about the countryside the way that he did. Making a display of himself, showing them all up. Going to the pub even, practically every day he went, showing himself off. Letting on to everyone. ‘Anybody who can go out drinking in the pub can go to work.’ That’s what everybody would be saying.

Mrs Cartwright came back into the sitting-room, holding the tablecloth and cutlery.

‘Here our Betty, get your records cleared off the table if you please, it’s time that I was setting it out, ready for our Dan, he’ll be here in a moment. You know how he is with his meals usually, regular as the clock.’

‘Oh mother can’t he eat in the kitchen?’ Betty angrily began to thrust her records back into their sleeves.

‘No he can not, there’s no fire in there and he’d get cold. April isn’t out still, and it’s none too warm as yet.’ She spread the cloth and laid out a plate of bread and butter, salt, pepper, vinegar and a bottle of tomato sauce.

They heard the clatter of kicking, scuffling feet outside the door.

‘There he is now, that’ll be him scraping his boots.’ Mrs Cartwright opened the door. ‘Come on in love and get yourself sat down, I’ve made you a lovely bacon hot-pot like what you like.’

Dan willingly allowed himself to be led to the table. Mrs Cartwright helped him off with his jacket, and he sat there in his shirt sleeves, holding his spoon ready, licking his lips in anticipation.

‘Bert Tatlers let me feed his fishes,’ he said. ‘They all

come swimming round for it, and I found a bird's nest over by t' Goose Pond—wi' eggs in it.'

'Yes well never mind about that now love. You can tell me all about it when you've eat your dinner.' She brought the steaming hot-pot—fresh from the oven—out of the kitchen and set it lovingly on the table, in front of Dan. 'Now then get it down you before it goes cold.'

Betty watched in disgust, as Dan poured tomato sauce over the hot-pot and then began to eat it with his spoon, straight from the baking-dish, sopping up the gravy with a piece of bread held in his other hand.

'He might at least use a plate.' She pulled a face as Dan, shovelling the food lustily into his large mouth choked over a piece of potato that was too hot and spat it back into the dish. His hands were covered with mud from the Goose Pond. 'And wash his hands, they're filthy!'

'Now you stop picking on him.' Mrs Cartwright poured Dan a mug of tea out. 'A bit of honest muck never did anybody no harm.' She patted Dan's shoulder. 'Now then love, when you've got your belly filled, you tell me all about it, about feeding the fishes and finding the nest and all.'

After he had finished his dinner and drunk his cup of tea, Dan recited his lunchtime adventures to his mother, getting excited and almost incoherent as he fumbled for words to describe the little jewel-like tropical fish darting about the tank after the food. Later, Betty began to play her records again, and he went out once more. He wanted to meet Johnny Starter after he had finished at school, so that he could show him the nest by the Goose Pond, while he still remembered about it. The nest was on the ground, half concealed by a tuft of grass, and it had four tiny little spotted brown eggs in it. Dan had taken one out and held it in his hand. Very carefully, for fear that he might crack it. Johnny would be able to look in his book of birds with all the coloured pictures, and say what sort of nest it was, then Dan and he would come back at intervals and watch until the eggs hatched, and they'd see the baby birds.

As he walked back up the lane, clouds built up, obscuring the pale spring sun, turning the valley cold, robbing the slatey, quarry walls of their colour, transforming the abandoned ironworks into a stark, blackened skeleton, naked and decayed, crumbling against the broody, grey sky.

Dan turned off, left, along Forty Row, intending to take the short cut across the fields so that he would be sure of getting to the grammar school before Johnny came out. From one of the upstairs' windows in the middle of the forty long block of terraced houses, with their little gardens and green-painted doors, Jenny Greenhouse watched his dark figure lurch past.

'Fancy,' she thought, 'Dan Cartwright, just the same as ever.' So much had changed whilst she had been away. The green fields gone, all built over behind the house. Now all that one could see from the back windows was the estate. Morgan's farm where, as a child, she had used to go for milk, was turned into a store—Harry Morgan would be serving behind the counter, she supposed; that wasn't very easy to imagine.

It was nice to see Dan. To see that at least one person hadn't changed. She remembered him at the little village school—that was closed now, and the children from Barlow Bridge and Forty Row went to the modern, comprehensive school on the estate. Dan was a few years older than she was, but he had always been kept down at school due to his backwardness and general inability to learn anything, so for a while they had been in the same class. What a case he had been even then, she thought, he was so much bigger than any of the other boys, and yet so gentle. Everyone in the class had a little plot of garden in Hall Wood where they tried to grow vegetables. It was during the war and it had been Miss Rankin's effort to help to dig for victory. Dan had never been able to grow anything very much on his own plot, but he was always willing to help the others with the digging and any other heavy work. Being so big

it had meant nothing to him. Jenny wondered how much those afternoons at the gardens in Hall Wood had really contributed to the war effort. She had spent most of her time vaguely considering the possibility of digging to Australia, although once she remembered that she managed to grow some runner beans which Miss Rankin had told her to send to the hospital. They hadn't looked very many when they were picked, but the hospital had still sent her a letter, thanking her. Miss Rankin had read it out at morning assembly after the hymn. At assembly Dan always pumped the old-fashioned organ while they sang the hymn. Up and down, up and down, while the rest of the school stood, two to a hymn book, singing in their flat, childish voices—'All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small'—it always seemed to be 'All things bright and beautiful'. Jenny supposed that they must have sung other hymns, but if they had, she couldn't remember them. Just 'All things bright and beautiful'; tugging at the hymn book, Miss Rankin, nodding her grey head approvingly in time to the tune, and Dan absurd in short trousers at his age—he must have been nearly fourteen then—enthusiastically working the pump. And how soft hearted he was, especially about animals. Once when one of the white mice that the class used to keep as pets, died, he had been so upset that Miss Rankin had to send him home. He looked just as funny as ever. Still had that same ridiculous way of walking, with his head hunched between his shoulders and swinging that silly walking stick. Jenny Greenhouse turned away from the window. He was lucky in many ways, she supposed, understanding so little of what was going on around him. He would never feel the pain of the world, when you love somebody and . . . God what a fool she was being, she thought she'd got over all that. 'Come along gal,' she said to herself, 'spirit that built the British Empire, thin red line stuff and all that jazz'—that was what Basil always used to say.

She looked at her child who was sitting on the floor,

playing with his brightly coloured alphabet bricks. It was time she got him fed and bathed, if she was to get to the Stag for six o'clock. And there was her mother to see to as well. The fussy old witch would probably want her bed making or her false teeth washed or something—all the time she was after attention. No wonder that nurses never liked being put on the old women's ward. Imagine a dozen or more like her.

Outside Dan walked on to the end of Forty Row, then through the mossy wooden stile and across the sodden waterlogged fields, with the housing estate making its crawling progress over them, burying the green land. Near the main road he came to the hen-pens, with their tatty fences, lovingly built out of odd scraps of materials, barrel staves, railway sleepers, bits of broken up ring-frames, old brass bedsteads—anything that could be scavenged from work or the tip, clumsily nailed or tied together. In the pens were ramshackle little huts, like the fences knocked together out of anything that was handy, and then covered with roofing felt or oilcloth to make them waterproof. Often the oilcloth, which would have covered first the sitting-room and then the kitchen floor, before being relegated to the hen-pen roof, would have black scars, caused by wear, in odd contrast to its garish pattern, and scrawled across in white painted, clumsy lettering would be an advertisement: 'Fresh eggs—newly laid' or possibly: 'Garden flowers—very cheap', or: 'Oily firewood—one and sixpence a bundle'. Most of the older men in the neighbourhood had a pen. They remembered the old days, as they always called them, when in hard times it was often essential to have a second string—some means of raising a bit of money if there was a depression. Now they were pensioners, but they still tried to make a bit on the side, but the younger men didn't bother with pens, and as the old men died or decided that the work of maintenance was beyond them, more and more pens remained untended, hunting grounds for cats, overgrown with weeds, the fences falling down and

the wind whistling through the empty windows of the sheds and greenhouses.

There was one old man working in his pen. An old, old man, very slow and methodical, crouched, his back permanently bent. He seemed only to be held together by the broad, oily leather belt that he wore back to front. He had his sleeves rolled up revealing his shrunken arms. His legs were slightly bowed in greasy moleskin trousers tucked into cheap, torn rubber boots. He waved to Dan and, glad of an excuse to stop working for a while, he straightened up and watched him go past. Dan was out of sight before he picked up his spade and resumed his futile digging at the hard, stony earth. He had some notion of growing lettuces to sell and eke out his pension. Every year he'd had the same idea, but never got the ground dug over in time. He thought enviously about Dan's strong frame. 'If I were half his size I'd soon have it done,' he thought to himself. 'Get it dug in no time.'

When he got to the main road, Dan looked carefully both ways before crossing and turning left; down into Rutledge, to the grey, stone grammar school, gothic-windowed. Dan stood on the pavement near the wrought-iron, open gate with the Rutledge coat of arms carved on the arch above, and the school motto—coined by the first headmaster—'Learn and Live' in Latin.

As the clock on the parish church struck four, the school bell rang and the boys started coming out. In dribblets of one or two at first then in large bunches, shouting and screaming, congesting the playground. The small ones pushed and pulled at each other, snatching each other's caps or schoolbags and throwing them into the shrubbery that fringed the concreted playground behind the high, iron railings. Noisy and boisterous, cruel and vicious, they poured noisily out into the street, tripping each other and trying to prod each other's testicles with their rulers.

The older boys were more sedate, conscious of their dignity, wearing their black and green caps with affected

nonchalance, pushed to the backs of their heads, ready to be pulled off and stuffed, out of sight in their pockets, as soon as they were around the corner, away from the prying eyes of masters. Then out would come the cigarettes, to be smoked too quickly and without much genuine enjoyment on the way home. Occasionally they would clout a younger boy who was senseless enough to get within easy reach, using painful judo blows that they had learnt from going to the pictures—cuffing they called it—short sharp blows with the edge of the hand.

Dan soon spotted Johnny in the seething, hurrying mass of figures. Much smaller than most of the other boys and less aggressive—so proportionally more prone to their aggression—he was jostled violently from side to side as he crossed the playground, clutching his satchel in one hand and holding his cap firmly in place with the other, in case somebody should try to grab it off his head.

When he came through the gate, he saw Dan immediately, broke away from the main stream of the shrieking, yelling mob of youngsters and ran up to him.

‘Hello Dan.’ He put his cap straight, and looking nervously back over his shoulder at the other boys, he took Dan’s arm and led him quickly down the road.

‘Here Johnny I found a bird’s nest over by the Goose Pond,’ Dan mumbled slowly. ‘I wanted to show it to you while I remembered.’ He paused in his speech for a moment, trying to think what else it was that he had to tell Johnny. He put his forefinger in his mouth and then rubbed his nose with it. The side of his nose felt cold where it was wet with the saliva. ‘It’s got some little eggs in it. It’s in the grass.’

A big loutish, fresh-faced, ginger-headed boy on a bright yellow painted bicycle, came riding furiously towards them, shouting loudly and ringing his bell. He recklessly mounted the pavement so that they were forced to leap aside, out of the way. Dan stumbled and almost fell in his clumsy manner.

‘Yah, hark at Dr Frankenstein and his monster.’ The ginger-headed boy shouted at them over his shoulder. He careered back onto the road, swaying from side to side, still ringing his bell until he disappeared out of sight around the next corner. Johnny gripped Dan’s arm more tightly.

‘Come on, let’s go and look at the nest,’ he said. ‘We’ll have plenty of time before tea.’

They walked together down the main road until they came to the turning for the short cut across the fields to Forty Row. They left the main road and went along the track by the hen pens.

The old man was still there, but he had stopped digging. He was grumbling to himself as he clumsily tried to repair some holes in his fence and his shed with wire netting and a ball of jinney bant. Cats had managed to get in the night before and had killed some of his young chickens. He heard Johnny and Dan and looked up at them. They were walking quickly, excited about the nest. The old man left his work and watched them as they left the track and took the muddy path over the fields.

WHEN DAN got home for his tea, after showing Johnny the nest, his father was already in, sitting in front of the fire in the sitting-room. Johnny had told Dan that the nest was a skylark's. They had heard the bird singing way up in the air above their heads, so high that they couldn't see it.

There was a picture of the eggs in Johnny's bird book, just like those in the nest—brown and spotted. Johnny said that in about a week they would hatch and become little skylarks with no real feathers—only down—and the mother bird would feed them until they were big enough to fly and look after themselves. Johnny said that he and Dan would be able to go and look at the nest and watch the baby birds grow, but that they must on no account move the nest because even if it was only shifted a few inches the mother skylark would not be able ever to find it again.

Dan's father had stopped work early, because he had been on an inside job, fitting the door frames at a new old folks' home, being built by the council. The electricity hadn't been installed in the half finished building, and when the sky clouded over it became too dark to see properly in the dim daylight that still filtered in through the empty windows, so they had knocked off until the next morning.

He had finished his tea and was reading the evening paper that he always collected on his way home.

'You're a bit late Dan,' he said. He had taken his boots off, and had put his stockinged feet up on the cornice, still wearing his overalls and work shirt. He always sat like that for a while after he had finished eating—'Letting my tea digest'—he would explain. After his tea had had plenty of time to digest he would go into the kitchen and have a good

wash. Singing to himself and scrubbing his face and neck and arms with great enthusiasm. Afterwards he would carefully brush and comb the grey, thinning hair across his high, narrow skull and go off to his meeting. Almost every night he had a meeting to go to, band practice, the pigeon club, the union or even perhaps a lecture at the public library in Rutledge. When he went to a lecture he always listened very conscientiously to what the speaker had to say and when he got back home he would relate the content of the lecture to his wife. He took these lectures very seriously and would ponder over them for weeks after. Before young Fred had gone to Australia, he had sometimes accompanied his father to these lectures, but now the old man went alone.

While his mother was putting his tea out on the table, Dan told his father about the skylark's nest. Fred Cartwright looked rather weary as he listened to the long, rambling narration, slowly delivered in hesitant, monosyllabic words. He did his best to follow what Dan was trying to explain however, and when he had finished, he nodded his head.

'There aren't so many skylarks about nowadays,' he said. 'A nest takes a bit of coming across; it's not everybody who can find one.'

'Has our Dan been telling you about feeding Bert Tatlers' fishes up at the Stag?' Mrs Cartwright bustled through from the kitchen, carrying a plate of bread and butter.

'No he was saying how he and young Johnny Starter's been and found a skylark's nest over by the Goose Pond, haven't you Dan? They're going to keep a watch over it until the eggs hatch.'

'Oh yes he were on about that at dinner time and all. He's a good lad is young Johnny Starter. I reckon that he'll be a doctor or summat when he grows up, way he is with animals and that.'

'He's a clever lad right enough,' her husband said, putting his newspaper down and standing up. 'He's not very

strong though, I don't think. He's so thin and delicate looking.'

'Aye, he's got hardly any flesh on his bones to be sure.' Mrs Cartwright put the plate of bread and butter down on the table. 'Come on Dan, get yourself sat down.'

'What he wants is building up with some of your flesh puddings lass, that would put some weight on him.' Mr Cartwright walked into the kitchen. As he ate his tea, Dan could hear him splashing vigorously over the sink, singing to himself:

'Oh as I went home the other night,
As drunk as I could be,
I looked into the lobby,
And here's what I did see,
Hanging on the clothes peg
As plain as plain could be,
Was someone else's bowler hat,
Where my old hat should be.'

He dried his hands on the communal family towel that they all used except Betty with her fancy ways—she had to have a towel of her own! Then he took his shaving tackle out. He didn't bother with a mug, but used the water in the bowl that he had washed in, to lather his face.

'I took it to the missus,
I showed it to my wife,
She said, "Why that's the funniest thing,
I've heard in all my life.
Why you fool," she said,
"You silly old fool.
It's very plain to see,
That bowler hat's a plant-pot
That my mother gave to me."'

When his face was well lathered, he stropped his razor,

trying the edge of the blade on his hairy forearm, until it gave him satisfaction. When he had decided that the razor was sharp enough, he began to scrape away vigorously at his face. Several times he cut himself, and covered the scratches with little patches of newspaper to stop the blood flowing. He held his nose out of the way with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand while he shaved his upper lip. Then pulled his face into grotesque distortions to stretch the slack skin, when he did underneath his chin, and around his throat.

‘ Well I’ve been this wide world over,
Yes I’ve travelled this wide world round,
But that’s the first plant-pot with a lining in,
That I have ever found.’

He could hear Dan in the sitting-room, banging his spoon on the table top, in accompaniment to the song. Dan was a good lad, he’d never been any trouble. Course, he could get a bit trying at times what with all his questions, just like a kid. But so what? It was nice having somebody in the house that still listened to what you had to say. What you could still do something for, who you could offer advice without it being resented. Like young Fred, he should never have gone to Australia, he was a clever lad right enough—wasn’t he a radio-technician?—and like he’d said, there were big opportunities out there, but it wasn’t right for him to leave his own country like that—suppose that they’d all left in the twenties—what would have happened in nineteen-thirty-nine? Young Fred had got a good job there with the government at the rocket base place, making big money, but he should have stayed where his family was. Young Fred was married now and had children—his grandchildren! Right over on the other side of the world, where he’d never be able to see them.

And Betty! Her with her stuck up ways. She seemed to look down on her parents, almost as if she was ashamed of

them. Never spent any time in the house hardly, and if you pulled her up about the least little thing she got her hair off right away. Kids! Trouble was that they grew up too fast. When they were small, you did everything that you could for them, and soon as they were old enough to fend for themselves, they despised you for it. Not Dan though, he was different altogether. It was comforting to know that at least one of your kids still needed you.

At about the same time that Fred Cartwright finished shaving, Jenny Greenhouse was serving the first customer at the Stag. Although she started at six o'clock, it was very rare that there were many people in much before seven. Drinking habits had changed and men no longer went to the pub after a drink, as soon as they had finished work. Apart from the miners who could get cleaned up at the pit baths, they went home first to wash and change.

The solitary first customer was an old man. His hair needed cutting and hung from under his greasy cloth cap in long, dirty-grey straggles over the scarf he wore, fastened tight round his thin neck. He wore a little posy of flowers, wrapped in silver foil from a cigarette packet to keep them fresh, and pinned to the lapel of his shabby jacket, so ancient that its original colour and pattern were lost.

As Jenny put his money in the cash register, he took his pint of mild over to a warm corner by the glowing fire. He took out a pipe, the stem wrapped round with adhesive tape so that he could hold it between his toothless gums, and slowly began to fill it with twitching, shaky fingers.

'Them cats has been at my chickens again last night,' he said, half to Jenny and half to himself. 'I had to repair my pen today, they'd got in through a hole in the fence. If I could afford some proper wire netting I'd soon have it fixed up I would that, in no time at all. But what can you do on a pension. I got it measured up once and it 'ud cost me a small fortune. I'd have to come up on Littlewoods. Course it 'ud pay for itself in a week or two. You know, when

you've got to make do with bits and pieces, you're at it all the time.' He tore a strip off a newspaper and folded it into a spill. 'See like today I should have been digging me plot over to get me lettuces in, but what happens? I have to spend all the afternoon mending me fence. See all this messing about with bits and pieces takes up time, and like time's money to me.' He lit his pipe from the spill, then carefully pinched out the burning paper. 'I could have wept when I went in today I could, seeing what them cats had done. Five of me little chicks, lying dead, their bits of feathers all over the place. Hadn't eaten 'em, just killed them and mangled 'em about, I'd hang them cats if I could get me hands on 'em, murderers—that's all they are. Suppose that they'll be making their holes again tonight . . . see if I had some proper wire netting . . .' the old man gazed vacantly into the fire, slowly sucking at his pipe . . . 'At this rate I'll never get me lettuces in.'

The old man lapsed into silence and Jenny offered vague condolences.

The bell over the door tinkled.

'Hello Jenny.' She looked up. Harry Morgan, his blue eyes twinkling. 'I heard that you were back.'

'Why hello Harry, yes I came home a week ago.' She remembered Harry Morgan as he'd been four years ago. Before she went away, they had been out together several times. She supposed that she had been fond of him in a way. How passionate he had become about her, and what a clumsy lover he had been. Young and too anxious, fumbling in his hurry to satiate his passion. She wondered what would have come of it if she hadn't gone to London when she did. He was so careless, he would probably have had her in the family way if they had gone on much longer, he never took any precautions. It was always up to her, what had she used?—A make-up sponge dipped in vinegar as a sort of makeshift pessary. Another girl a few years older than herself had told her about it, and shown her how to fit it while they were still at school. Well come to think of it, that had

worked pretty efficiently, and as for getting put in the family way that had come to her eventually in any case. Oh well! It was a bit late to start worrying about that now, she'd had her chance and refused it.

'Well don't I get served?' Harry asked.

'Oh yes of course, I'm sorry.' She pumped him the pint of bitter that he asked for.

'How have you been?' Harry said.

'Oh all right, I've got along. Nice to be back again.'

'It's very nice to have you back. Do you plan on stopping now like?'

'Looks like it with my mother being so ill. Somebody has to look after her.'

'Yes.' Harry looked down at the bar. 'You certainly add a bit of beauty to the old pub. Look a lot prettier behind there than Bert Tatlers.'

'I've got to do something. You're behind a counter nowadays I hear?'

'Yes when I'm not out delivering. When the council took over all the land it meant the end of the farm and we were a bit stuck like. Then Dad got the idea of opening a shop. He said we'd get plenty of custom from the new estate. He was right too, we're doing all right, no competition see. We even take in the laundry—course we send it off to be done, we're just like agents—but it's a profitable little sideline.'

'Three pints please miss.' Jenny had to move down the bar as the pub began to fill up.

'Let me give you a lift home later,' Harry said. 'I've got the van with me and don't forget that I go over your way.'

At about nine-thirty Jack Scott came in with Dan. Jack Scott considered himself very much of a comedian, and because he was big and played Rugby football for Rutledge a lot of other people pretended that they thought so too. He had seen Dan hanging about outside the Stag, and decided to take him in and have a bit of fun at his expense.

‘Pint of bitter Bert,’ he said to the landlord, ‘and a glass of mild for my mate here’—he turned and winked at the other customers—‘Danny-boy here is going to entertain us a bit. Aren’t you Dan eh?’

Dan nodded uncertainly as he took the glass of beer. He had come out to get some fish and chips from the shop across the road, and he wasn’t sure that he should have come into the pub. His mother didn’t like him to go into the pub at night. He shuffled his feet, the hobnails in his boots clattered on the tiled floor. Confused by the loud noise of the unmusical piano in the corner, he stood still in the middle of the crowded room. The men were different from what they were at lunchtime, too much beer had made them brash and boisterous, their voices strident.

‘We’re going to have a bit of fun aren’t we?’ Jack Scott said. ‘You’re going to give us a song eh Danny-boy?’

Dan looked round at the roomful of men. He grinned and made a kind of guttural, unintelligible noise in his throat. The pianist had stopped playing, and swivelled round in his chair to watch what was going on.

The landlord, Bert Tatlers, asked what Dan was going to do. He didn’t look very happy about the whole business, but didn’t like to offend Jack Scott who very quickly turned nasty when he’d been drinking. Several of the men who were playing cards put their hands down on the table and looked up expectantly.

‘Like I said, he’s going to give us a bit of a song. It’s one that he says his Dad sings, and he don’t remember the words so he’s going to whistle it for us.’ Jack Scott laughed loudly, too loudly. ‘I meets him outside here and I says, I’ll buy you a drink Danny-boy, if you’ll entertain the lads a bit, give us a song. And he says he don’t know the words, but he can whistle it. Don’t you?’ He nudged Dan, who just grinned, stretching his thick neck and allowing Jack Scott to take the glass of mild off him. ‘Course, he can’t have his drink until he’s give us the song, can he? Got to earn his booze before he sups it.’

Jack Scott put the glass of mild down on the bar out of Dan's reach, and picked up a tray of cheese biscuits off the counter.

'Not as we expect him to perform on an empty stomach. Here Dan have one of these.' He thrust a biscuit at Dan who obediently ate it. 'Here have a couple more. The belly of a chap your size takes a bit of filling.' He pushed more biscuits at Dan, almost forcing them into his willing mouth. 'Now then, get your song whistled and earn your ale.'

Dan gazed round nervously and tried to whistle. Of course the flaky, cheese biscuits had left his mouth full of crumbs and dried up his throat so that he couldn't make a sound. Automatically, he reached out for his glass of mild, but Jack Scott stopped him.

'Nay you've got to whistle your song first.'

Dan frantically tried to whistle. He made deep coughing sounds in his throat, trying to clear it. His eyes began to pop in their sockets, as if they were trying to squeeze out between the lids, as he tried to please Jack Scott. The best that he could do was produce a dry, blowing sound, spitting out crumbs over the nearer customers.

'Come on Danny-boy,' Jack Scott said, between loud gales of laughter, 'you can do better than that.'

Dan tried to whistle again. Desperate to earn the glass of mild, that he'd been promised, he breathed deeply, filling his great chest with air. Filling the room with laughter, he puffed out his cheeks, turned purple in the face. The veins on his neck throbbed with the effort as his contorted lips strove to make a sound. He perspired heavily, his eyes rolling and anxious, like a frightened dog's.

Suddenly Jenny Greenhouse, who had been watching it all, could stand no more. She felt disgusted at these men for allowing Jack Scott to treat Dan in this way. Not that they could call themselves men! She walked round to the public side of the bar, and snatching the glass of mild she thrust it into Dan's hand.

Jack Scott resented her interference and began to protest, but she quickly interrupted his angry arguments.

‘You should all be ashamed of yourselves,’ she shouted, ‘and you in particular. I’ve never thought very much of you—I’ve always thought you were a loud-mouthed bully, but tonight you’ve made me sick. Drink your beer before I throw it in your face and get out, you pig.’

Jack Scott was amazed at this sudden attack. He was too stunned to retaliate at first, he was never very fast with words and by the time he thought of a reply, he kept it to himself. Her angry eyes put him off.

‘I was only having a bit of fun,’ he said. He could sense that the temper of the room had changed. He had never been very popular, and the men, ashamed and angry with themselves, were directing their resentment at him. Jenny stood glaring at him still—she was that vicious sort—he wouldn’t put it past her to crush a bottle in his face, the way she was looking. Leaving his drink, he turned on his heel and walked out.

In the street outside, he stood for a moment on the pavement, thinking of all the crushing things that he might have said back. It had all happened so suddenly, taken him by surprise. He’d get his own back; she wasn’t going to talk to him like that, but he’d pick his own time.

In the pub, the men shamefacedly returned to their games of cards and the pianist took to thumping at his instrument again. Dan was still standing, confused, holding the glass of mild. Jenny walked up to him.

‘You drink it up,’ she said. ‘What are you doing up here at this time?’

Dan had to think for a while before he could remember. He was still sweating profusely. At last he managed to mumble an explanation about the fish and chips.

‘Well you go and get them,’ Jenny said, ‘and then go straight home, your mother will be worrying. Now drink that quickly.’

Dan was not used to drinking quickly and some of the

beer drooled over his chin. Jenny took a handkerchief from her pocket and wiped the sticky liquid off his face and throat. She walked to the door with him and watched his dark figure cross the road and enter the pool of bright light that was the fish and chip shop doorway.

THE COOL, April sun had to climb high, before its weak rays could reach down into the valley and as Jenny Greenhouse walked out of the little house on Forty Row, Barlow Bridge was still gloomy and cold in the shadow cast by the rugged peak of Robby's Monument. Jenny could see the line of the shadow slowly creeping down the hill-side opposite, above it the slaty rocks, that buttressed the shale slopes, borrowed colour from the morning sun. Below, they were grey and damp as they tumbled in huge, jagged, broken steps, down to the valley floor. The whole crumbling pile looked like some vast, insecure heap of masonry that might at any moment slip and slide down; burying for ever the crumbling iron foundries, the disused pit-heads, the old marshalling yards with the lines of rusting tracks and abandoned rolling stock, decaying, overgrown by the hollyhocks and the blackberry bushes, between the ruined factories.

An odd, eerie place. Tools still lay where they had last been put down. It was almost as if it had been deserted overnight. But Jenny knew that it had not been so. First the coal had run out, or was so deep underground that it was too costly to mine for it, and the pits were no longer worthwhile to run. Then the depression, and the first mills in the district to close had been those of Barlow Bridge. Lastly the iron works, shrinking smaller and smaller until that was gone also. The trains that had once come in full of people from Rutledge, now they rattled empty into Barlow Bridge's little station at the end of the viaduct, to pick up the people who still lived there. Even the trains would have stopped running if buses could have got into

the valley. But Barlow Bridge had never known buses. It had scarcely known traffic at all on its narrow streets. Goods had come either by the railway or along the canal. People who didn't want to take the train walked over the field paths or cycled along the lane, which was too steep and winding to take other traffic easily.

Forty Row was in an odd position. On the rim of the valley it overlooked Barlow Bridge, mouldering four hundred feet below. And behind was the housing estate and Rutledge's chimneys. It was an amazing contrast, the old in front, the new behind; and just as Forty Row faced Barlow Bridge, so it still clung to it. Still worshipped at the little corrugated tin chapel and still shopped at Molly's post-office-cum-grocery-cum-hardware-and-general. Of course Molly's was closer, closer even than Morgan's, but having to climb back up the hill with a heavy basket was a distinct disadvantage, apart from the fact that Morgan made deliveries—the lane was quite negotiable until it started to wind down into the valley. Yet the people of Forty Row, out of habit perhaps, still went to Molly's for most things, and it was right—towards Barlow Bridge—that Jenny turned when she reached the end of the row.

She had only walked a few yards, just to where the lane began to drop steeply, level with the green Goose Pond, when she heard a high pitched warbling coming from behind the hedge on the right. At first she thought that it must be a bird, but on walking to the hedge and peering through, she saw that it was Dan whistling, as he walked over the fields from the direction of Hall Wood. He was swinging his stick as he strode, alternately stabbing and swishing at the tufty grass. The whistling grew louder as he came closer to Jenny—bird noises, shrill, loud and surprisingly musical, high and clear in the still, morning air.

Dan turned slightly, and Jenny realized that he was making for a gap in the hedge about fifty yards away, down the lane. Jenny walked on towards Barlow Bridge, strolling slowly, unobserved by Dan through the thick hedge, hoping

to meet him at the gap. They met just as Dan was turning into the muddy lane.

‘Hello Dan,’ Jenny said.

Dan stopped when she spoke. Mumbled incoherently and looked shyly down at his big feet, as he always did when greeted by someone that he didn’t know very well. Jenny thought again how little he had changed since being a boy at school. He used to stand just the same way then, shuffling his feet about with embarrassment whenever Miss Rankin had spoken to him.

‘You don’t remember me do you Dan?’ Jenny said.

Dan pushed his stick into the ground, drawing with it, making whirls and arabesques—rhythmic *graffito* patterns—with the feruled tip in the mud.

‘You was in Bert Tatlers’ last night.’ The words seemed to climb out with difficulty, from somewhere deep inside his massive frame. Merely stumbling from his fleshy lips, as if they wanted to stay inside. They came out muffled and distorted, giving the impression that his mouth was full.

‘That’s right, but don’t you remember me from before that?’ Jenny put her hand underneath his chin, and gently lifted his unresisting head, so that he had to look at her, ‘Don’t you remember, at school, in Miss Rankin’s class? You used to dig and help in the garden, and pump the organ when Miss Rankin played the hymn in the morning.’

Dan obediently tried to remember back, but it was too far. The organ, the garden, the school, Miss Rankin were all forgotten. But if Jenny said he knew her, that was enough for his simple mind, and he became less shy and smiled sheepishly.

‘I heard you whistling as you came over the fields,’ Jenny said. ‘It sounded lovely, just like a bird.’

‘I know where there’s a bird’s nest,’ Dan said. He spoke a little bit more clearly now that some of his shyness was gone. ‘Me an’ Johnny Starter is goin’ ter watch it ’til th’ eggs hatch out.’

‘Really. What sort of nest is it Dan? What sort of bird?’

Dan tried to recollect what Johnny Starter had told him from the bird book, but he couldn't.

'Dunno, I forgot, just a bird. If you move the nest, the bird can't find it no more—'s a bird that flies right up an' sings, like this—" Dan imitated the song of the skylark, putting two dirty fingers in his mouth and closing his eyes. The tune trilled and tremoloed, filling the air with sound.

'The skylark you mean,' Jenny said when he stopped.

Dan thought for a moment.

'Yer, that's um. The skylark.' He repeated it again, proud to have remembered, 'Skylark, an' if you move the nest, it can't never find it again. I'll show you where it is if you want. You won't move it will you?'

'No I won't move it,' Jenny promised. What a case he was. 'It's not too far away is it?'

'Only by t'Goose Pond. Come on, I'll show you.' Dan started off up the lane, pausing after a few steps while Jenny caught up with him.

They reached the Goose Pond and climbed through the fence. There was the nest, brown and soft, cuddling the four speckled eggs. Jenny gazed down at it. Being with Dan, she felt some of his own childish wonder and naïve content, as if she herself were a child again, seeing the nest with all of a child's young excitement.

Dan was such a comforting person, so simple, so peaceful. Even children had their vicious side—the human feelings of greed, selfishness were present in an embryo state, waiting only to be developed by experience—Jenny had observed them in her own child's nature. But all of that seemed to be missing in Dan, and Jenny hoped that it would always remain so. Yet to her Dan's peace seemed so fragile, as fragile as these tiny eggs. It could so easily be shattered. It was all rather like Humpty Dumpty . . . Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, All the king's horses and all the king's men, Could not put Humpty together again . . . We're all Humpty Dumpties, Jenny thought, all sitting on walls,

waiting to be pushed off, and when we are we try to patch ourselves up as best we can, and back onto the wall again to wait for another push. But we're never quite the same after. Who, she wondered, would put Dan together again if he got pushed? But perhaps she was wrong. Perhaps Dan was one person who would be lucky, and never suffer the world's blows. But he seemed so weak and defenceless, that was why she had been so upset when Jack Scott had been making a spectacle of him the night before.

'You can pick an egg up if you want ter,' Dan said, 'as long as you don't squeeze it, an' if you put it back.'

Jenny laughed. How strange it seemed to be talking to Dan like this, as if she had gone back to her childhood again. But even when they were children, she had never really spoken to Dan before, or had a glimpse into his world like this. Children are quick to notice any outsider, and the group will always avoid them. Dan had always been the one who wasn't all there, the backward one, remote, distant, and the rest of the children had left him alone. Speaking to him and being quite friendly, but never inviting him to join the strange, semi-ritualistic, group activities of which children are so fond.

'There's tadders in t'Goose Pond now an' all,' Dan said. 'They grow into frogs—look.'

He led Jenny to the edge of the green scummy water. She never thought about her shoes as they stood together on the muddy bank of the pond.

'There, see 'um wriggle about.' Dan bent down and skimmed some of the duck-weed aside with his hand. For a moment, Jenny had a quick glimpse of the tiny, brown-black creatures before they rapidly swam off to obscurity underneath the floating weed.

Jenny again thought nostalgically about her own childhood days. She had played in these very same fields. She remembered coming to the Goose Pond to catch tadpoles. Her mother had always told her not to. 'Nanny Greenteeth will get you,' her mother used to say. Nanny Greenteeth,

the wicked old woman who waited under water to drag unwary children down to eat for breakfast. It never seemed to stop children playing near water though. Jenny looked at her wrist-watch. Good heavens! Half past twelve, it was time she got moving if she were to get her shopping done.

'I'm going to Molly's shop down in the village,' she told Dan as she picked up her empty basket from where she had left it by the nest. 'Are you coming that way?'

'Yer, I gotta go home for me dinn.' Dan lived next door to the shop.

'Come on then,' Jenny said. They climbed through the wooden fence again, back to the lane, and walked together down the steep hill towards Barlow Bridge. Dan was whistling to himself and Jenny still thinking about her childhood and musing about life in general. What a happy time it seemed on looking back. Wandering around the countryside, seeing with young eyes, and feeling the fresh wind on new faces, pink and unworn, sensing the green of the grass, the exciting smell of new cut hay. Finding berries and eating them picked straight from the bushes. Jenny could remember the sour taste—usually they were eaten long before they were ripe and she supposed now that most of them probably had worms inside, but they hadn't known that then.

Yes, when she was very young she had been happy enough. It was when she was a bit older, approaching adolescence, that she had been most wretched. Then she had only been concerned with growing up. She had felt that she could not grow up fast enough. Could not be free, her own boss. How she had resented her parents' and her schoolteacher's authority. When she was about thirteen, she remembered that she had made up, concealed in the coal shed. At nights she used to sneak out and put it on to make herself look and feel older. She never had anywhere to go and she had no mirror so that she couldn't even see herself. But it had made her think that she was getting closer to being an adult. Well she had certainly realized her

childhood ambition—she had grown up! Or had she? Perhaps she hadn't really. Maybe that was what Basil had meant by her juvenile emotions. What was it that he had said when they had last met? 'What has love got to do with it? Can't we just carry on as we are . . . I promised to make an honest woman of you as soon as I can make father see reason didn't I?'—how he had sneered when he'd said that—'And meanwhile don't I look after you and the child?'—The child, or your child—he always said it like that, never our child.

Maybe he was right. Who was she to expect more? A builder of fairy castles in the skies, he'd called her once. Presumably she was. Castles in the skies—possibly it was foolish as he said, possibly all dreams were foolish. But one couldn't settle for less than one's dreams, at least she couldn't, and maybe that was juvenile, being unable to compromise.

At last Jenny and Dan passed under the rusting iron bridge that marked the entrance of the village, and walked up the cobbled street. Just before they came to the shop, Dan turned into the garden of the little house.

'Gotta go now and get me dinn,' he said to Jenny. As she walked on and into the shop next door she saw him carefully scraping his feet on the step before opening the door.

As she walked through the low door and into the shop Jenny was aware that the two customers inside and Molly herself went suddenly quiet, almost as if she had interrupted them whilst they were talking about her. The two women were old and wrinkled, brown withered skeletons. They stood there wearing floral aprons and faded dresses, their black cotton stockings hung slackly, wrinkling round their shrivelled calves. Their jaws moved mechanically over their empty gums, as they watched her curiously, through their bright, hostile eyes.

'Good morning Jenny,' Molly said crisply, neat and trim behind the counter as she had always been. Her hair pulled back in a tight, grey bun, firmly held in place by pins. Her

spectacles gleaming on the end of her thin nose. Her interminable knitting lying on the counter beside her. She is too clean, Jenny thought, too clean, too sharp—like a knife.

‘What can I get you Jenny?’ Molly asked and Jenny gave her a list of purchases that she had made out.

‘Hm, written out on a piece of paper,’ Molly sniffed and ran her eyes quickly over the list, holding it at a distance as if it might be dirty. ‘We don’t make deliveries like the town shops you know, or Morgan’s store.’ Jenny could sense the resentment in her voice.

‘I know that, it’s just that I thought that if I wrote them out, it would save time, make it easier for you. If you’ll just put them into my basket as you get them and tick them off on the list, I’ll take them with me.’ Jenny handed her empty basket across the counter.

‘Well thank you very much I’m sure, I can’t think how I’ve ever managed before. A list indeed.’ Molly shook her head and began getting the things, ignoring the basket and putting them out on the counter, while the old women watched, sucking in their cheeks. At last she had finished.

‘That will be one pound three and six,’ she said, making the calculation on a bit of tissue paper before wrapping the bread up. She said it as if she expected that Jenny would not be able to pay. ‘All those cigarettes, you know, come to a lot,’ Molly added—Jenny had bought twenty—tipped because they were a few pence cheaper.

Jenny took her purse out of her pocket and paid Molly. Molly didn’t offer to put the things in Jenny’s basket for her, so she did it herself.

‘Good morning,’ she said. Nobody replied and she walked out of the little shop, hearing the bell tinkle as the door closed itself behind her. She saw their faces, half hidden behind the pattern of ancient advertisements, pasted on the window. Their lips were moving in the dim faces; they were beginning to talk now that she could no longer hear what they were saying. Well let them.

Jenny walked slowly back up the steep hill, carrying the heavy basket. Last night after she had finished at the pub she had let Harry Morgan give her a lift home. At the corner he had stopped the van and together they had smoked a cigarette, talking over the old times, about old acquaintances and what had become of them, but not, she was glad, about their own affair. He was curious about her, she could see that, but she was pleased that Harry had the grace not to ask her any questions. Harry had seemed very pleased to see her again. She vaguely wondered whether he could possibly still be in love with her after all these years. He had certainly had it bad, and he had never married she knew. When she had said that it was time that she was going in the house, he had jumped out of the van to open the door for her. The way that he had looked at her, she had been worried for a moment, afraid that he might try to get passionate. But he had only kissed her very lightly on the cheek. Then he had held her hand for a moment:

‘It’s nice to have you back,’ he had said, repeating the same words that he had used in the pub. That was all, then given her hand a squeeze, climbed into his van and driven off, very quickly—too quickly. She had been worried in case he was trying to take the winding lane too fast. His whole attitude had been as if something was preying on his mind, rather strained—yes, as if something was preying on his mind. It was difficult to understand. But at least he had been friendly. Harry Morgan and Dan were the only people who had shown any sign of friendliness towards her since her return.

Her mother would not have had her in the house if she hadn’t needed her, she was certain of that. It wasn’t even her mother who had sent for her, but her uncle George who lived in Rutledge.

One morning a letter had arrived from him, saying that her mother was very ill—would be bedfast for weeks, maybe months—and could she come home to look after her?

Well, she had come, and what a welcome. Of course Bert Tatlers and the people who went in the pub were friendly enough, but they were mainly from the estate, and Bert Tatlers was new at the Stag. It wasn't the same. None of them had known her before she went away, so they didn't count somehow.

When she had first left the village, she had imagined to herself that she would return in triumph, the fabulously beautiful, highly talented Jenny Greenhouse, who had conquered the big city. Just where her talent would lie she hadn't been quite sure. Her ambitions had been vague, inspired by the romantic novels that she had read, and the serials in the weekly magazines—actress, dancer, fashion model. But whatever she eventually became, she was certain that she would soon be 'discovered' and become overnight, the toast of the international set.

On that first train journey to London, she had speculated about her homecoming. In a huge car of course, and she had seen herself stepping daintily out into the lane, displaying one shapely calf for the benefit of the hordes of newspaper photographers—the beautiful, talented Jenny Greenhouse would be well known for her willingness to co-operate with the press, and they would adore her for it. Naturally she would be accompanied by a tall, handsome, well-dressed man—her devoted slave—perhaps a film star, or a peer, but very distinguished. How the people of Forty Row would gape from their windows.

Jenny laughed to herself as she remembered her old day-dreams; she didn't suppose that she had ever really taken them seriously, but she had expected something—not the film star or the peer really—but a fair success at least. Well she still had her sense of humour, that was something.

'Come on tosh,' she said to herself. She turned along Forty Row and then into the garden of the little house, pausing to latch the gate behind her.

The garden was overgrown with weeds and grass, and the

privet hedges had assumed tree-like proportions, blocking the daylight out of the downstairs' windows. It had been left untended more or less since her father had died. Jenny looked critically at the privets; something would have to be done about those, they made the front room so gloomy, and perhaps she could do something with the rest of the garden while she was at it. The garden would give her something to occupy herself with, when the weather improved. She could bring little Julian out in the sun while she worked, clearing the weeds away, laying out a bit of a rockery perhaps—there were those broken up flags in the back-yard, left there after the old stone floor had been taken out of the house and a wooden one put in. She could build them up under the window and bed in some small rock plants; rock plants were quite cheap, and hardy too. Maybe she could incorporate a little bird bath; it would be very pleasant to have the birds come down in the early morning, to splash and chirp in the garden beneath her window, waking her with their singing.

She walked up the gravelled garden path and put her basket down on the doorstep while she fumbled in her purse for her key. When she found it nestling amongst her small change and the litter of bus tickets, she took it out, inserted it in the lock and turned it, then pushed open the heavy old-fashioned door, with its blackened, peeling varnish. The house still smelt vaguely musty, but, thank God, not half so bad as it had when she'd first come home. Scrubbing out the rooms, passage and stairs had made a great improvement, although she wouldn't really be satisfied until she got that horrid wallpaper off—she was sure that the walls were filthy underneath. Actually the house probably wouldn't look half so bad—in fact quite gay—with some modern wallpaper, and the woodwork repainted in a lighter colour. Of course it was a pretty enough little cottage—it had just been so neglected.

'Is that you our Jenny?' her mother called from upstairs, as her heels sounded down the worn lino in the

passage. She could hear the dragging of slippers feet as her mother shuffled across the floor above. The old hag had got out again, in spite of what the doctor said. The bedroom door opened and the old woman came out onto the landing, leaning heavily on her stick. She had pulled an outdoor coat on over her nightdress, and she held the collar tight around her throat, to shield her narrow, flat-chested body from the draughts that blew round the passage and stairs.

‘Will you go back to bed, Mother—you know that you’re not supposed to be up,’ Jenny shouted.

‘Where’ve you been all this time? Me pot wants emptying and me fire’s gone out.’

‘Wait a minute Mother, I’ve only just got in.’ Jenny watched in disgust as the old woman hobbled back into her room. That was what they would have had her become, prematurely aged—almost senile before she was sixty. Let them look at her mother and then blame her if she didn’t intend to cripple herself in the mill, and then drudge for some loutish husband, out drinking every night while she raised child after child. Things were supposed to be different today, but she had seen girls not much older than herself—girls who had been at school with her, wheeling their third or fourth about. When she had left they had been quite pretty, now their bodies were flabby, their skins grey, their faces shrunked, their spirit completely gone. What could you expect, getting up at five o’clock in the morning to feed the kids, before dropping them off at the nursery. Then nine hours in the cardroom at the mill, and home to get the house swept out and a meal ready for their families. The only difference today was that they had the telly to watch, while their husbands were out boozing, and maybe an electric washer on the hire purchase, although to look at some of them you’d think that they hadn’t even got a water tap—always looked half washed.

Well she wasn’t going to be made into one of those zombies, toothless at thirty, wearing soiled underwear.

Jenny felt the clean fresh comfort of her own soft lingerie, coolly caressing her body, warm and tingling with the exercise of her brisk walk up the hill from Barlow Bridge.

Whatever had come of it, she would never regret her decision to get out. To get away from Barlow Bridge and Rutledge. Away from the North altogether.

She shuddered when she remembered those first few years after leaving school that she had spent in the mill. Going there in the morning. Those clammy, cold, grey foggy mornings, and then the overpowering heat of that great, terrible, strident room, throbbing with the sound of the machinery. How she had hated it all. The smutty remarks that the women shouted back and forth to one another. The way the carder felt her whenever he got the chance. Brushing against her at every opportunity, surreptitiously squeezing her buttocks or her breasts, laughing loudly when she objected. It was all supposed to be part of the fun of working in the cardroom. Fun! When you went home with your hair and clothes full of that filthy cotton.

Every night she used to wash her hair to get the cotton out, and her mother used to get offended by it—offended because she wanted to be clean! Her mother had considered so much washing a form of vanity—a deadly sin in her eyes. ‘A little Madam,’ her mother had used to call her. But by then Jenny had been past caring. She had long been branded a whore in her mother’s eyes for going out without any underwear on. Her mother hadn’t been able to understand that she would rather go out with no underclothes on at all, rather than wear the same soiled garments for more than one day at a time. That habit had stamped Jenny as a born whore in her mother’s eyes while she was still at school, by which time, her mother had already ‘washed her hands of her’.

Her mother had called her a whore more than once, pronouncing the word in the north country way—‘you dirty

'oo'er'—the way that it sounded so particularly repulsive. She still called her a whore, always adding that she was glad that Jenny's poor father wasn't still alive to see what his daughter had turned into. Her father. Jenny could only remember him as a meek, work-worn, little man, always tired, despised by other men, humiliated and downtrodden by his wife. The old witch had probably driven him into the grave herself, Jenny thought.

'Will you bring t'bucket up and empty me po,' her mother shouted again.

Let her wait a bit, she would see to Julian first. Jenny walked into the kitchen and lit one of the jets on the grease-stained, old-fashioned gas stove.

Half a mile away, Harry Morgan was driving his van around the streets of the estate, making deliveries.

He was thinking about Jenny. About the night before when they had sat talking and smoking in the van, after he had given her a lift home from the pub.

She still cared for him. He was sure she did, the way she had talked about old times. And he was certain now that the child was his. It must be, it had to be! But why had she never told him about it, he thought as he drove. Did she think he was the sort who would have stood her up? Why had she sneaked off like that? But then she had always been rather independent, and . . . well, proud. Maybe it was her pride that made her do it, thought of what the neighbours might say if she had a child within seven months or so of getting married. But why should that bother her, lots of girls got married with one in the oven, it was only natural.

It was her all over to go away . . . sensitive like. Or maybe it had happened that last time and she hadn't come back because she had thought that he might not believe her. Or maybe after telling everybody that she was going to make a career for herself in London, she hadn't wanted them to see her admit defeat.

All those years they had been apart, and he had thought

that he'd forgotten her. But she still cared, that was the main thing. It still wasn't too late.

After leaving Jenny, Dan ate his dinner of pudding and chips and then went out again. He walked up the lane to the bus terminal and the pub, past the old men still sitting on their bench. He turned right, along the main road, away from Rutlidge, towards Trout Clough and Robby's Monument. The road ran downhill for half a mile, winding round the foot of the great hill.

Here, no housing estate had yet started to encroach on the countryside, and fields stretched on the right as far as Barlow Bridge. On the left was Robby's, the looming mass topped with purple heather, and crowned by the castle-like folly, built on this spur of the Pennines by Owd Robby himself, a hundred years before. Owd Robby—Mad Robin Barlow; Barlow Bridge had been named after his family, who had once owned all the surrounding land and had developed the ironworks, the mines and the other industries in the valley.

Mad Robin Barlow had lived in Barlow Bridge, in the great old mansion that now mouldered in ruins at the end of the overgrown drive in Hall Wood. The ironworks, the mines, the mills had all been his, but now all that remained for people to remember him by was the ugly blackened folly that was named after him.

When he came to the bridge over Trout Clough, with its wooded sides and tumbling, singing stream, Dan turned off the road and walked down into the valley. Downstream the valley became deeper and narrower until it entered Raven Vale—a rocky gorge that later widened into the valley at Barlow Bridge. But Dan walked upstream, where Trout Clough was a winding valley worn by the stream as it tumbled down the hill-side from the moors on the top of Robby's. He walked with his eyes glued to the ground. There may once have been trout in the stream, but like the geese on the Goose Pond nobody remembered seeing any.

If there still were, Dan would have seen them if anybody had, but he hadn't, and he wasn't looking for trout now. The golf course was nearby—one boundary flanked the clough, and Dan was looking for stray balls. He had seen golfers on the course and if he found a ball, he would knock it all the way back down the clough, the way he'd seen them do; using his walking stick, turned the wrong way round, for a club. Then when he had got the ball home, he would pull it to pieces—biting through the outer skin with his teeth, and then unwinding the yards and yards of elastic, until he came to the bit of hard rubber in the centre, small as an alley.

Dan frequently went to Trout Clough looking for golf balls. It was one of his regular visiting spots, like the Goose Pond. Today he had covered most of his regular April territory in the morning. He had been to Hall Wood, watching the birds and the squirrels, he had visited the Goose Pond to see the tadpoles and skylark's nest nearby. It was some time since he had been to Trout Clough; golf wasn't governed by the seasons and there was a chance of finding golf balls any time, Dan went there perhaps half a dozen times a year and without thinking he had turned in that direction.

Dan walked up and down the sides of the valley searching carefully. After an hour or so he had covered most of the ground with no success and he was beginning to lose interest. His wanderings carried him further up the clough, to where, after half a mile, the valley bifurcated. Dan took the right-hand fork—the larger of the two and walked along the side of the narrow, shallow stream, not bothering to look at the ground any more. He took a pipe out of his pocket and put it between his teeth. He rarely smoked, except sometimes when the boys off the estate gave him cigarettes. But, always imitative, he would carry a pipe about with him, and sometimes take it out and suck it.

As he rounded a corner of the winding valley he came upon some young boys, aged about twelve or so, busy doing

something beside the stream. There were three of them, happy and muddy, their hair tousled, their faces hot and red as they tugged at stones and sods of turf.

Dan recognized them, they were off the estate.

The leader of the small gang, a precocious delinquent called Nat Kershaw, who belonged to a notorious family of troublemakers and petty criminals—half of them were always either in prison or on probation—straightened up as Dan approached.

'Hey it's Samson. Ayah Samson.' He wiped his nose with the back of his hand, smearing his dirty face with the mucus.

'Ayah Samson, Ayah.' His two followers obediently echoed the greeting.

'Hey look what we got here Samson,' Nat said, he pushed a black hand into the pocket of his ragged jeans and pulled out three small cylinders of cardboard. He held them out for Dan to see—they were fireworks. 'Fireworks sithee, thunderflashes. One of us teatchers at schoo' took 'em of us last bonfire time, burra found 'em in 'is cupboard. They'm bangers see, an' we'm going to build a dam an' blow it up.'

'Yer Samson, blow it up,' one of the gang repeated, shouting in his enthusiasm.

'Get shagged will you,' Nat hit the other boy in the face with the back of his hand. 'Ain't I just telt 'im. Here Samson, you goin' to 'elp us?'

Dan was always ready to join in anything and he had built dams before. He took off his jacket and started pulling sods with great gusto, tossing them down to the two smaller boys, who were stopping up the stream with them, weighting them down with stones, and plugging up any gaps with handfuls of mud.

As the muddy water rose higher and higher Nat stood on the bank supervising the operation, swearing at his two myrmidons whenever they made what he considered a mistake in the construction, and hitting them occasionally for some special blunder. All the while, Dan wrenched up the

hunks of grass and threw them down, carefully taking out any worms first—in case they got hurt—and putting them back on the naked soil, where they could wriggle to safety.

At last the dam was completed to Nat's satisfaction. It rose a dirty, untidy, green heap almost two feet high, and the large muddy pool behind, stretched upstream, opaque and yellow, for over three yards.

'Right lads,' Nat said. 'Now we blow it up see, set the charges and send it cracking.' He signalled them all to stand back out of his way, while he bent down and carefully inserted the three fireworks at the foot of the dam. 'Right you are then lads, get well back.'

Dan and the other two boys quickly ran several yards up the side of the clough, away from the stream. Nat lit the fuses of the thunderflashes with a cheap, chrome-plated petrol lighter that he had filched from one of his brothers, and then hurried after them. They crouched down behind a hawthorn.

The fuses glowed red and then sputtered into life.

They watched tense and excited as the fuses burnt lower, and the first firework went off, rapidly followed by the second. The sharp reports echoed round the valley, but the dam remained firm as the last firework continued to fizz.

'She ainta goin' to go,' one boy said. 'We'm made her too strong, she ain't a-goin' to go.'

'Yah, you get shagged just you watch an' you'll see,' Nat said. As he spoke, the final firework exploded, scattering mud in all directions, cracking the bottom of the dam so that the yellowy brown water spurted suddenly out. The hole grew larger, one sod broke completely away and floated down on the tide of water. Then the whole dam quivered and burst, the great rush of water washing the sods of grass and even some of the stones before it.

'What did I tell yer, what did I tell yer,' Nat said. They all jumped excitedly up and down, Dan clapping his hands. 'I can blow up anything I can. Look at it go'—the disturbed stream still hadn't returned to its original level—

'When I grow up, I gonna blow all sorts of things up, you see. Blow the whole world up if I want to.'

'You couldn't,' one of the other boys said. He stood with his feet apart, leaning against a tree. His belly pushed forward, one hand in his pocket, the other picking his nose. 'You couldn't.'

'I could,' Nat said, 'with an H-bomb I could.'

'Well then you'd blow yourself up as well,' the other boy said triumphantly. He managed to extract the blackened mucus that was blocking his nostril, rolled it into a ball and flicked it idly at the third boy.

'Don't care . . . Anyway I could go in a shelter.'

'There ain't any shelters agin' H-bombs.'

'There are in America,' the third boy said.

'Huh Yanks just say that, they're a lot o' big heads, they'll say owt, I'd sooner have t' Ruskies.'

'Yer, t' Russians are all right,' Nat agreed. 'I saw some Cossacks once on t' telly—riding through fire.'

'They ain't as good as t' Yanks,' the third boy insisted, 't' Yanks can shoot better.'

'Only on t' flicks an' on t' telly.'

'Yeah that's all.' Nat crouched down on his haunches, picked up a twig, and began poking at the ground with it. 'My dad said that when he were in th' army, he saw a yank shoot himsel' in t' leg trying to do a fast draw.'

'What were your dad in th' army?'

'He were a gunner.'

'Huh mine were a corporal.'

'Well he were a sergeant gunner.'

'Mine were a sergeant major.'

'Mine were a officer.'

'Mine were a captain.'

'Mine were a general.'

'Mine were a field-marshal.'

Nat tried to think of a rank higher than field-marshal and couldn't.

'He couldn't a been a field-marshal,' he said, determined

not to be outdone. 'They only had one field-marshal an' that were Monty.'

'How do you know, you don't know.'

'Course I do, they can only have one boss can't they? They only have one boss everywhere.'

'Well he were a field-marshal in t' French army then.'

'How could he be a field-marshal in t' French army if he were British?' Nat threw the twig down into the stream.

'He'd joined t' Foreign Legion.'

'Huh well anybody can be a field-marshal in t' French army,' Nat sneered. 'It's not as high as a general in t' British army.'

The argument might have gone on longer, but the third boy interrupted: 'Who do you think were t' best, Monty or Rommel?'

'Huh who cares.' Nat shrugged his shoulders. 'Who do you think's best—Wyatt Earp or Matt Dillon?'

'Huh Wire Twerp, he's no good, he's a pansy. Matt Dillon's bigger.'

'How do you know, they make 'em stand on boxes, you can't tell.'

'I can, he's a lot bigger.'

'Wyatt Earp's faster, and Matt Dylon's a bigger pansy, he always sez he didn't want to kill 'em after.'

'I like t' Lone Ranger,' the third boy said.

'Huh, t' Lone Ranger 'he never kills anybody.'

'Here look what I got.' Nat took a large, powerful-looking air pistol out of his pocket and twirled it on his finger. The other boys looked at it enviously.

'Is it a real 'un?'

'Course, it were me brother's. I found where he'd hidden it under t' cistern, watch.'

Nat put a slug in the gun and fired it against a tree. The pellet hit the trunk with a dull thud and the other two boys and Dan looked at the hole it had made.

'How about letting us have a go?' one asked Nat.

'Haven't got no more slugs,' he said. Nat stood and

thought for a moment. 'Here tell you what, we'll play Indians. Samson can have the gun and be the cavalry after us.'

Nat gave Dan the empty pistol and explained to him what he had to do.

'You got to give us a start 'till I say ready and then you got to catch us see.'

Dan waited until Nat had gone about fifty yards down the clough then Nat shouted ready, and he went after them, chasing through the trees. The boys easily avoided his clumsy attempts to catch hold of them. They dodged amongst the trunks, whooping, thumbing their noses and shouting: 'Can't catch me for a penny cup o' tea.'

Gradually they worked their way down the clough until at last Dan managed to seize Nat by the ankle.

'Barley,' Nat said, putting his thumbs up, 'Barley Bumstead.'

Dan let Nat go and the four of them walked on breathless and happy to the road and then towards the estate and their various homes for tea, Dan carrying them in turn piggy-back and singing the Zulu song that Johnny Starter had taught him:

*'Gin gan gulla gulla gulla gulla watwah,
Gin gan goo, gin gan goo. . . .*

Up at the top of the clough, a man on his way home after caddying at the golf course, had heard the fireworks go off and seen Dan chasing the boys with the empty pistol in his hand.

'Funny that,' he thought.

Meanwhile Jenny Greenhouse, sick of her mother's constant demands for attention, put on her stoutest shoes, left the little house on Forty Row and walked over the fields in the direction of Hall Wood. It had been a mistake coming home, she should have ignored the letter; after all,

it had only gone to an accommodation address. Uncle George would have assumed that she hadn't received it and found somebody else to look after her mother.

As she turned into the fields, Harry Morgan saw her from his van in the lane. He sat in the driving-seat watching her, then quickly making up his mind, he put the handbrake on and taking his overall off and slinging it onto the seat, he set off after her, covering the ground in long easy strides.

He caught up with her as she was climbing over the fence of the old grounds.

'Hullo Jenny,' he said.

'Harry!'

'Going for a walk?' He pulled the barbed wire down, holding it to the ground with his foot, so that she could step over more easily. 'Mind if I come with you?'

He didn't wait for a reply, but stepped over the fence himself, and together they walked into the wood.

'I been thinking about extending the store,' Harry said after a while. 'Now that you can get meat ready-weighed and packed there's no reason why we shouldn't start selling it—red meat I mean. Thought we'd start a bit of a butchering department like.'

'I thought that it was your father's store.'

'Well of course, he's boss in name, but we run things together like. Now if we started selling meat see, what I'd do is move the chap we have working for us now over to a special counter of his own—maybe give him a striped apron and a couple of butcher's knives and all. Course, he wouldn't have to do any butchering, but it'd draw custom a bit—you know if he looked like a real butcher—a sort of gimmick. Anyway if we did that, thing is that we'd need somebody else on groceries giving me a hand like, and I thought maybe you.'

'Why me?' Jenny asked.

'Well you know, I thought that you'd be better off than at the pub.'

'Well it's very nice of you to think of me Harry, but I have to be in most of the day with mother you know, so I'm afraid that I couldn't very well do much except evening work, that's why I started at the Stag.'

'It was just a thought.'

'And a very kind thought Harry. I can just see you trying to persuade your father to dress somebody up in a striped apron, serving meat, just as an excuse to take on an extra assistant. Thank you very much.'

'Oh that's all right.' Harry smiled. 'Do you remember, we used to come here as kids?'

'Mmm yes, Sherwood Forest.'

'What?'

'Don't you remember?—Robin Hood, all the boys had bows and arrows and this was Sherwood Forest.'

'Yes, I'd forgotten. What were you, Maid Marion?'

'I was a girl, and Robin Hood and his merry men wouldn't have anything to do with girls—except as targets!'

'Get away.'

'It's true, you were always shooting and throwing things at me.'

'Was I?'

'Well you were no worse than the others. Oh look there's the house.'

They were more than half-way through the wood now, approaching the Rutledge side of the wood where the old drive was, leading from the grounds to a cobbled lane that wound across the fields to the town. They could see the old hall through the trees on their right. It had been closed up for more than thirty years, and its old splendour was long decayed.

'Let's go up to it Harry. Do you know I've never really seen it properly, we always used to keep away, thought it was haunted.'

'I went in once,' Harry said, 'a whole gang of us did. I remember we found a portrait in one of the rooms, a picture

of a chap in an old-fashioned suit—we used it as a target for our arrows.’

‘Vandals!’ Jenny turned in the direction of the house. ‘Come on.’

They walked along a narrow path, the brambles plucking at Jenny’s skirt. The undergrowth was thick in this part of the wood and they found an old fallen tree trunk blocking their way. Harry climbed over first and then turned round to help her. She took his hand and clambered up onto the log, but her rubber-soled shoe skidded on the slimy green surface and she slipped off, down into Harry’s arms.

For a moment he just held her, and she couldn’t help but feel a sudden, urgent longing at this first contact with a man’s body for several months. Then his grip tensed and he kissed her hard on the mouth. At first she merely made no effort to resist him, just standing limp in his embrace, but soon she was eagerly offering her mouth to his, her arms tight around his strong muscled body. She felt his hands begin to grope over her body, fumbling at her clothing and she was aware of the sudden cold striking her hot breast as he unbuttoned her blouse, his thigh, hard and demanding against hers. For a lucid moment she tried to push him away, as the initial impact of their sudden bodily contact wore off, but already the nipples of her breasts were rising under the clumsy caresses of his fingers and her mouth was searching for his, refusing to let go, her nails dug into his back. She couldn’t help but give way to her desire, just as she had always done, impelled against her will by the demands of her hungry body.

Heated now, she thrust him off for a moment, and taking off her coat, she spread it on the ground beside the log. Then her lips trembling, she sank onto it, pulling Harry down with her.

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR ALFRED ALDWYCH climbed painfully out of his car as it drew to a halt at the signal of the uniformed constable, standing on the grass verge by the rusting iron gate. The rough cobbled surface of the lane that wound from Rutledge main road, had played havoc with Aldwych's hangover and he stood blinking in the sunlight. First fine day we've had this year, he thought, what a morning for a murder, first fine day. He walked towards the gate.

The constable stepped forward and saluted.

'The gate won't open sir, it's rusted up. You have to get in down this way sir.' The constable led the way and Aldwych followed him past the line of vehicles—the patrol cars and the ambulance—to where part of the wall had fallen down. Two more policemen were apathetically clearing away the rubble of old bricks and mortar. When they saw Aldwych approaching they straightened up: 'Making it a bit easier for the stretcher sir,' one explained. Aldwych nodded absently.

'It's just through here sir,' the uniformed constable said, and stood respectfully aside to allow Aldwych through first.

'All right, all right, you're supposed to be showing me the way,' Aldwych said irritably. The constable hurriedly led the way into Hall Wood.

Aldwych trudged miserably along behind him, watching his trouser bottoms darken as they soaked up the moisture from the long wet grass, steaming in the morning sun, unusually warm and strong for April. First really fine day! Aldwych had drunk too much the night before and was

regretting it. His conscience wasn't suffering, even though he had consumed most of his bellyful after time and in flagrant violation of the licensing laws and the feelings of the landlord, who wanted to close up and go to bed, yet daren't refuse to serve Aldwych, who was in a position to make trouble for him. But Aldwych's head felt like Birkenhead, his eyes were aching, his ears singing and he just longed to get back into the bed that he'd just been knocked up out of—and where he would have stayed for several hours more if it hadn't been for the murder.

After walking a couple of hundred yards they came upon a group of figures, busy beneath the trees—taking measurements, photographs, notes. On the fringe of the group stood two bored-looking ambulance men with a stretcher.

Detective Sergeant Paully was darting about looking very much in charge.

'What's he got to look so bloody happy about,' Aldwych muttered to himself.

'Morning sir,' Paully said as soon as he spotted Aldwych. He went bounding towards him beaming. 'Lovely spring morning for a murder.'

Aldwych grimaced.

'There's no doubt then.' He had half hoped that it might prove to be a false alarm, and that they'd let him go back home to bed.

'Afraid not.' Dr Milson, the police surgeon, called. He waved a nonchalant hand in the direction of the rubber-covered hump at his feet. 'Strangled, see for yourself.'

Aldwych picked his way over to where the doctor stood, painstakingly wiping his hands on a piece of lint, humming snatches of *Carmen* to himself.

He bent down, lifted up the sheet of pink rubber and looked down at the body. He resigned himself to the long day ahead.

'This where she was found?'

'Right there sir, lying on her coat, just as she is now.'

Paully said, 'Like as if she'd been killed sitting up with her back against that log and then slipped down after—see there are bits of wool from that cardigan thing she's wearing, caught on the bark.'

'Hmm. Smart bit of crackling too.' Aldwych replaced the sheet and straightened up. 'Anything else?'

'Well I reckon that she must have been sitting here for some time with a man. We found four cigarette ends see, and only two with lipstick on them.'

'No lead there I'm afraid sir,' he added. 'They were all her brand.'

'How do you know?'

'Well in her handbag there was a twenty packet with sixteen still in, and the cellophane wrapper and the silver paper were on the grass here, so she must have only just opened it.'

'What about tracks—car—footprints?'

'You've seen the lane outside sir, a tank wouldn't mark those cobbles. As for footprints, well, we might find something but I doubt it—not anything that'll help with identification anyway, not on long grass and pine needles.'

Aldwych rubbed his fleshy nose and turned back to the doctor.

'How long has she been dead?'

Dr Milson shrugged his elegant shoulders with affected boredom. He was adopting his usual cynical pose.

'Fifteen to twenty hours, some time yesterday afternoon I should say. At the outside between one and six, more likely between three and five.'

'Intercourse?'

'Impossible to say for certain until I've made tests in the laboratory, but I think so—and it isn't what you're thinking. This is no sex crime, not in the ordinary sense anyway, this isn't the old business of rape and then young Romeo getting the collywobblers in case his mum finds out, and finishing the girl off to keep her mouth shut.'

'Why not, there are signs of a struggle right enough?'

'Well I don't suppose that she would exactly keep still whilst she was being strangled, do you?' Dr Milson said coldly.

'Go on then what's your theory?' Aldwych said.

'Well there are certain stains on the undergarments. When a woman is sexually aroused there are certain glandular secretions that. . . .'

'All right, all right, I know all about that. Cut the jargon out and get on with it.' Aldwych said impatiently.

'My, we are bad tempered this morning aren't we?' The doctor raised a supercilious eyebrow. 'Been on the booze again Alfred? Better let me mix you a tonic before I go.'

'I don't need anything.'

'I wasn't thinking of you, old boy, it's we lesser lights who suffer from your hangovers. Now where was I. Ah yes, certain stains on the undergarments indicate that intercourse took place . . . But of course you've read Beatrix Potter's advice to newly-wed Bunny rabbits and you know all that.' Milson smiled brightly. 'Now if it had been rape, I would expect the clothing to be disturbed and it isn't. I should say that the girl was quite willing and that intercourse took place some time before she was killed. I imagine that she came here with her boy friend, they had a bit of bed here, sat smoking for a while and then for some reason he strangled her—maybe they quarrelled about whose turn it was to push the fags, I don't know.' Milson shrugged his shoulders again. 'That's off the cuff and I'll let you have a full report later. I think you'll find that they are more or less the facts. Why he strangled her is up to you Sherlock. Now if Cecil Beaton has finished with her,'—Milson indicated the police photographer who was busy taking a picture of an empty beer bottle, in case it turned out to be evidence—'perhaps I could take Maria Martin and go. I should like to get on with things, going to the theatre tonight and I should hate to insult the company by arriving late.'

'Everybody finished here . . .' Aldwych asked. ' . . . Right, might as well shift her.'

The two ambulance men, who had been standing nearby smoking, put out their cigarettes and unfolded the stretcher. The remains of Jenny Greenhouse were placed carefully on it and they set off through the wood towards the lane. Dr Milson packed up his bag and followed after them, pausing to blow a kiss to Aldwych.

'bye daddy-oh.'

'He gets on my tits that one does,' Aldwych said confidentially to Paully. 'Stuck up bastard, sneering get. I'll have him on a speeding offence. If it kills me I will, one of these days, I'll have him on a speeding offence.'

'Where do we go from here?' Paully asked.

'Why he strangled her, whoever he is,' Aldwych mused, 'could be any of a dozen reasons—lover's tiff—jealousy—something like that. Or maybe he was a married man and she was putting the black on him; perhaps she was pregnant. Although smart arse Milson didn't say anything and I don't suppose that he'd have missed it—ha ha, we can drag him out of his precious theatre tonight to ask him. Anyway, we'll know the motive as soon as we find the boy friend and that shouldn't be hard. She worked at a pub didn't she? Have somebody round there right away—find out if there was any man that she used to spend a lot of time talking to, you can bet your life that there's been somebody hanging about. Oh and another thing, you said over the phone that she lived with her mother. Why didn't the old woman make any inquiries when her daughter didn't get home last night—question her and find out.' Aldwych looked round at the woods, the new leaves were just opening on the deciduous trees, pale, fresh green in the sunlight. 'Well there's nothing more that we can do here—keep the area cordoned off for the time being though. I'll see to that while you get off. I'll be waiting for you at the local station by the estate at Barlowmoor.'

‘Right you are sir.’ Paully walked off through the woods towards the lane where the cars were parked.

When he finally arrived at the new red brick police station at Barlowmoor three hours later, Detective Sergeant Paully found the inspector pouring himself a pot of tepid tea out of an enamelled brew can. Aldwych had just got rid of a bunch of newspaper men, after giving them what facts he knew and promising a quick arrest.

‘Get yourself a cup of tea,’ he said. He pushed the brew can across the station desk. Paully helped himself, tasted it and grimaced.

‘Who made this?’

‘Busy day,’ Aldwych said. ‘Lot to do for the local force. So the constable’s hard at it, pedalling round on his bike somewhere, and the sergeant has to do the brewing up. I don’t suppose he makes a habit of it. Well?’

‘Nothing sir. I’ve been to the pub and to see her mother. Nothing at all. She left home four years ago and only came back last week. She came home after her uncle had written to her, to ask her to return to look after her mother who is an invalid. Even the uncle doesn’t know exactly where she has been living. He wrote to her at an accommodation address in London. Came back with a two-year-old kid she did, which started the neighbours gossiping, but they don’t know anything more than we do. I questioned one or two of them about the possibility of a boy friend round here, and even though I could see that they were racking their brains trying to think of somebody, none of them could come up with any suggestions. Apparently she cut off all her relationships up here when she went away, and as far as anyone knows she hasn’t resumed them. They all agree that she was no good and that’s it.’

‘What about the mother. Did she give any reason as to why she didn’t report the girl missing when she didn’t turn up at home last night?’

‘The old woman thought that her daughter was the

original scarlet woman of Babylon or something like it.' Paully sat down on the corner of the desk. 'Said that it hadn't surprised her in the least. She said her daughter had often stayed out all night before she went away, and she just supposed that she was drifting back to her old ways. Doesn't seem the least bit concerned about her girl being murdered. Her attitude is that she is only surprised that it hadn't happened sooner. Only worry she has is about who's going to look after her now, and what is going to become of what she refers to, as her daughter's brat. Incidentally I called in the welfare people to see to that. They've taken the kid away—lovely little child it is too—they'll look after it for the time being, then if none of the other members of the family are prepared to bring it up, I suppose it will go into an orphanage.'

'What time did she last see her daughter?'

'Three o'clock. At least she heard her then. Heard the door slam as she went out and remembers the clock striking at the same time. They'd had a bit of a row and the girl stormed off in a huff apparently, and I can't say I'm surprised. From what I saw of the old girl, she'd drive a saint up the wall. She's the most selfish, self-centred old bitch you could imagine.'

Aldwych who hadn't much of an opinion of his own wife could well imagine.

'Three o'clock. Well that cuts a chunk off the time that Milson gave us, although it still doesn't give us much to go on. What about the child, any clues as to who the father might be?'

'Not really, the girl was pretty close-mouthed about it from what I heard—that's something else that annoyed the old woman, who seemed to think that her daughter ought to creep back into the old homestead full of repentance, and confess all. She never sent any letters home all the time that she was away, only a card at Christmas to the uncle—always postmarked London—he can't remember what district—and always giving him a London accommodation

address, where he could get in touch with her in case of emergency. He only had occasion to write to her once before; that was when her father died. She came home then for the funeral but she didn't linger, didn't even stay the night. That was three years ago, and the uncle said that she was wearing an engagement ring then—said that it looked like a good one too, but in spite of questioning, she didn't tell them anything about her plans. Oh and incidentally, I asked the uncle to drop in at central at two-thirty and officially identify the body.'

'Good.' Aldwych brushed his hand through his scanty, thinning, brownish hair. 'You know it looks to me as if this is a London job'—Aldwych was always ready to palm his responsibilities off on somebody else when he could—'I reckon that the father of that kid will be the man we want. Find out just what she has been doing down there these last four years. Ask the London boys to try and trace her and to find the father of the child. That's the line to plug.'

'But don't you think that it might be a local job?'

'Well we'll have to consider it as a possibility I suppose, just on the off-chance, but I doubt it'll get us anywhere. You can handle that side. Check again on any old boy friends, and have somebody at that pub tonight—what's it called, where she worked?'

'The Stag sir.'

'That's right, the Stag—have somebody there tonight listening to what the customers have to say about it all. It's surprising what you can pick up in a pub, when they get some beer inside, their tongues will start running away with them. Not that I think it will do much good, but we might just find out something useful. You never know, she might have just said something, let something slip out in conversation, that will give us a clue to who this London chap was, although I think we'll find out soon enough, in any case. Them lads down there are pretty sharp, they don't

miss much and I'm willing to bet that they'll have him for us in no time.'

'Right,' Paully said. He stood up. 'Oh there is one more thing, somebody saw her talking to the village idiot yesterday morning. A woman who lives at the end house on Forty Row said that she saw her going shopping and saw her stop and talk to this character—a great hulking chap he is who sort of hasn't developed, called Dan Cartwright, lives in Barlow Bridge. This woman said they talked for a while and then went off across the fields, about a quarter to twelve it was she said.'

'Well we know that no idiot did this; if it had been an ordinary sex crime perhaps; but we know that it wasn't. Whoever did this lot, was her lover as well and probably had been for some time.'

'Quite sir, but the local constable says that we might be able to get something out of this idiot chap if we question him. He says that he's completely harmless, like a big kid, and that he spends all his days wandering around the countryside. He doesn't miss very much that goes on, the constable said; and I think he might have seen something, either on the day of the murder, or—if she'd been meeting this chap before—perhaps he's seen them together at some time.'

'Yes, well you might as well go round and see him then. It'll keep the chief happy if he thinks we're busy. But I'm willing to bet it'll be that London chap who stuck one in her oven, and if it is then it's out of our hands, we just wait to collect. If it isn't him after all we'll just have to start checking again this end. We'll soon cop him if we bide our time, whichever way it turns out. Always do in these cases. You can lay any odds you like that the killer is cracking up this minute. Well, I'll see you later then.'

Sergeant Paully departed and Inspector Aldwych tried to make himself comfortable in the hard chair behind the desk. Yes, he told himself, it would be that London feller all right.

He leaned back and put his feet up on the desk. At last he could get a few hours' peace, his head was still throbbing and his eyes still ached. Maybe he could just snatch a couple of hours, before it was time to go to central and see about the official identification of the body. He closed his eyes and dropped gently off to sleep.

THE BLACK police car eased its way cautiously down the steep lane that led into Barlow Bridge. Sergeant Paully, trying to smoke a cigarette, was bounced from side to side in the wide back seat. Twice he burnt his fingers on his cigarette, and once he bit his tongue as the vehicle jolted, jerked and slithered over the uneven cobbled surface. Several times he thought that they were going to get flung right off the road and crash down into the deep valley on their left. But the driver knew what he was doing and somehow managed to negotiate even the trickiest corners—corners that looked impossible to Paully—and kept the car more or less under control.

Paully didn't agree with the inspector that it was someone from Jenny's past in London, who had killed her. If it were, he would never have met her in Hall Wood. Of course Aldwych would say that they had met somewhere else, and then gone to the wood together to do a bit of courting. But it didn't ring true—those shoes that she was wearing, they weren't the sort of shoes that she would have gone to meet a London boy friend in. They were walking shoes, just what she would have put on if she had been intending to go for a stroll through the fields. Paully's notion was that that was what she had meant to do and in the course of her walk she had met someone she knew, knew well and had met before like that. It must be a local man. Well at least Aldwych had given him a free hand to make his own inquiries along that line.

The inspector clearly didn't intend to make any effort to solve the case himself, but then it was Aldwych all over just to push it onto someone else. Paully often wondered

how he had ever reached his rank with the attitude he had. He could see what Aldwych was up to. If it was the man from London, then the case was solved without him having had to lift a finger. If it turned out to be somebody local after all, then it was no skin off Aldwych's nose, he could always insist that the line of inquiry had never been dropped—and of course, if they weren't getting anywhere, Paully would be blamed because he was conducting it. Whereas if there were any kudos going, the inspector would soon grab them.

At last the car reached the bottom of the hill and crossed the railway tracks which marked the beginning of the village street.

'That's the house, number three—next door to the shop,' Paully told the driver, and the car drew to a halt.

Paully sprang out and slammed the door behind him. All along the street people were opening their doors and stepping out to see what was happening; curious to know what had brought a car—particularly a police car—to their village.

Paully stubbed his cigarette out and stepped to the front window to speak to the driver: 'You'd better be getting the car turned while I'm inside,' he said. 'I don't suppose that I shall be very long.' He looked at his watch—twenty past one—he had about an hour to spare if he was to get to the identification of the body. Say ten minutes here, then he'd go and get himself something to eat.

He opened the garden gate and walked down the three steps to the low front door. As he knocked he saw two or three women's faces glued, open mouthed, to the window of Molly's shop next door, masked by the fading, peeling advertisements, watching him. Paully looked back, trying to appear severe and inscrutable at the same time, and failing miserably.

'Yes?' Mrs Cartwright opened the door, flushed from baking, her grey hair hanging limp round her face. Paully could smell the warm aroma of scones and pies, filtering

from the kitchen and filling the little parlour, offering homeliness through the open door.

'Mrs Cartwright,' Paully asked, 'Mrs Lillian Cartwright?'

'Yes.'

'I'm a police officer and . . .' Paully began.

'Oh my lord, it's our Betty. That maniac's got our Betty.' Mrs Cartwright stepped back, clutching her apron in both hands, screwing it into a tight ball. 'It's our Betty what has gotten chopped up in Hall Wood.'

'Chopped up?'

'It was on the wireless about it, on the one o'clock news. A woman's body found up at Hall Wood and the police making an investigation. I knew it, I knew it would be our Betty, going that way to work, and nobody about at that time in the morning except maniacs.'

'No, no it's not that at all,' Paully said, understanding at last.

'Not our Betty,' Mrs Cartwright calmed down a bit, 'not our Betty killed in Hall Wood?'

'No, as a matter of fact it's a girl called Jenny Greenhouse.'

'Oh thank the Lord. No I don't mean that, poor girl. Shouldn't have had that happen to her no matter what she was. But it was you coming knocking like that, and then saying you were a police officer and all. I thought it was our Betty for certain.'

'Yes, well quite, I'm sorry for startling you Mrs Cartwright. As a matter of fact it's your son Dan that I want to see.'

'Not his National Insurance stamps again? I thought we'd got that all sorted out. He doesn't work nor never has, and we don't ask for no sick-pay or dole for him, because Fred and me can support us and ours without no charity. We explained it all to the man who came to the exchange and we thought that it were all settled and done with.'

'No it isn't that. I should like to ask him a few questions about the murder. We think that he might be able to help

us. If I could just step inside for a moment. You see he had been seen talking to Jenny Greenhouse a few hours before she was killed.'

'Well I suppose you'd better come in then.' Mrs Cartwright led the way into the parlour. Warm and cosy, the fire glowing red in the carefully polished and black-leaded grate. The china elephants in a neat row on the mantelpiece, the cat drowsy, its velvet fur dusty, lying contented on top of the coal bucket.

'You see it is like this Mrs Cartwright,' Paully explained. 'Your son Dan gets about the countryside quite a lot and we think that he might have seen something. The girl was murdered yesterday afternoon and he may have noticed somebody hanging about the wood, or possibly a car on the lane. Another thing, we have evidence to the effect that whoever murdered Jenny Greenhouse may have been meeting her regularly since she came home a fortnight ago. Your son may have seen them together during one of his walks.'

'Oh I see. Yes he does get about to be sure. Spends all his time out walking. You can ask him if you want to. But he finds it very difficult to remember things you know. He's just upstairs getting himself ready to go out. He likes to get dressed up a bit, likes to think that he's looking nice and smart. I'll just call him for you.' She walked across to the curtain in the corner and drew it aside. The stairs led directly from the parlour.

'Dan, our Dan,' she shouted. 'Can you come down? There's a gentleman wanting to ask you some questions.' She turned back to Paully.

'He'll be down rightly. Can I pour you a cup of tea, I've just brewed some fresh.'

'I wouldn't mind at all,' Paully said gratefully. He was still trying to forget the taste of the horrible brew he'd had at the police station a couple of hours before.

'Sit you down then for a minute,' Mrs Cartwright indicated the settee, 'and I'll just pour you a cup.'

She picked up a deep brown earthenware pot and, being careful to put the milk in first, she filled a cup and handed it to Paully.

'My scones are about ready too,' she said. 'Maybe you'd fancy one of them.'

'Well they certainly smell good and I haven't had a chance to get much to eat today.'

'I could see that you were hungry. They must be keeping you busy what with this murder and all, but you look after your belly lad and never mind. I'll just go and get you a bit of summat.' She bustled off into the kitchen.

'Here you are, you'll be better after getting wrapped round this,' she said when she came back. She handed Paully a piece of steaming meat pie on a willow-patterned china plate. 'Get it down you and then you can have some scones after.'

'Thank you,' Paully said. The pie was so hot that it burnt his mouth, but it was good, thick with steak and onions, running with rich brown gravy.

'That was good,' he said when he had finished, wiping the gravy off his chin with his handkerchief.

'You won't be any the worse for it.' Mrs Cartwright put a plate full of hot buttered scones beside him. 'Now try some of these, and if you want any more, don't be frightened to ask. There's plenty more where they came from. We're never short of good food in this house. Ah there's our Dan coming down now.'

Paully heard heavy footsteps on the stairs, then the curtain opened and Dan came in. He was wearing no jacket, but had his cap on his head, and a blue silk tie fastened round this thick white neck, although he wore no collar to his shirt.

'Now then Dan, the gentleman's from the police and he wants to ask you a few questions.'

Dan looked at Paully, his mouth gaped open and he scratched at his ear.

'Can I have a scone Mam?' he asked.

'Certainly love, and you can sit down and eat it while you tell the bobby what he wants to know.' She smiled at Pully and brought Dan a scone out.

Dan and Pully sat facing each other, both eating their scones.

'Don't be shy now Dan, I'll be here all the time.' Mrs Cartwright stationed herself behind Dan's chair.

'He's very slow at remembering,' she told Pully. 'You'll have to be very patient with him.'

'That's all right Mrs Cartwright.' Pully finished his scone and took out his notebook. 'Now then Dan, do you know Jenny Greenhouse?'

Dan looked back blankly.

'Dunno.'

'This girl.' Pully took a photograph from his pocket and handed it to Mrs Cartwright who held it while Dan looked, 'You were with her yesterday weren't you?'

'Oh yer,' Dan said, slowly remembering. 'We went to look at the birdie's nest.'

'That'll be the nest he found over by the Goose Pond,' Mrs Cartwright explained. 'He's been talking about nothing else for days.'

'The Goose Pond?'

'It's a bit of a muddy pool, up the lane aways. Full of weeds and such—smelly place.'

'Oh yes, I think that we passed it on the way down,' Pully said. 'Now Dan Jenny has been murd . . . er hurt, and we want to find out how it happened. Now you saw Jenny and you went to look at the bird's nest by the Goose Pond. What time was that?'

Dan looked vacant then answered:

'Dunno.'

'Try to think back Dan. You were fond of Jenny weren't you?'

'She was all right. I seen her at Bert Tatlers' pub.'

'Good, you remember that. Now try again. Was it morning or afternoon that you saw her?'

Dan thought, screwing up his eyes.

'I hadn't had me din,' he said at last.

'That would make it before one o'clock,' Mrs Cartwright said. 'He were in afore one.'

'Hmm, that won't help much I'm afraid. Dan, did you see Jenny again yesterday?'

'Jenny?' Dan mumbled.

'The girl on the picture, did you see her again in the afternoon? What did you do yesterday afternoon, where did you go?'

Dan concentrated again.

'Looking for golf balls,' he said.

'That'd be over in Trout Clough,' Mrs Cartwright amplified. 'He gets over there a lot, by the golf course on Robby's.'

'We made a dam,' Dan said. 'Then blew it up. Boom.' He waved his arms about to show how the fireworks had scattered the mud, and imitated the sound of the bang, sprinkling Paully with saliva.

'Now Dan, calm down,' his mother said.

'Too far away to see anything. What time did he get back Mrs Cartwright?'

'About a quarter to five. I remember he got in just before his father, and his father caught the half past four train from Rutledge. He's been finishing early this week because of the light. He's a foreman joiner with the corporation and when they're working indoors and there's no electricity, they have to knock off if it clouds over bad like it did last night.'

'Quite, yes. Then Dan would be coming down the lane about the time of the er . . . crime. He would come that way?'

'Oh yes, he came round by the estate. I remember him telling us, he'd been with some boys from there. Why they weren't at school I don't know—must have been playing hookey.'

'Ah well that's something. Now Dan when you were

coming home last night, did you see anybody, anybody at all?'

'For me tea?' Dan said.

'Yes that's right, for your tea.'

'Didn't see nobody.'

'A car then, was there a car in the lane?'

'A motor, I saw a motor. It were stopped in t' road near Forty Row end.'

'What sort of motor?'

'It were a . . . One of them with no windows along t' side.'

'No windows on the side. A van you mean?'

'Yer, a van.'

'You didn't notice the number did you?'

Dan's face went blank again.

'He can't read,' Mrs Cartwright explained.

'What about the colour?'

'Dunno.' Dan reached forward and stroked the cat.

'Now there's just one more thing that I want to ask. Did you ever see Jenny—the girl on the picture—in the fields before, with a man perhaps?'

'Ner I din't see her never.'

'Well thank you very much Dan, you've been very helpful.' Paully closed his notebook and returned it to his inside pocket. 'And thank you Mrs Cartwright.'

'That's all right.' Mrs Cartwright stood up and saw him to the door. 'You're welcome. I only hope that Dan has been able to help. After all it might have been our Betty, and who knows, he might strike again whoever he was.'

'I don't think you need to worry on that account Mrs Cartwright. This is no homicidal maniac. We think that he had been her boy friend and I doubt whether he'll be after anybody else. In fact he probably never meant to kill her at all, just lost his temper and finished her off before he knew it. He's probably frightened to death himself right now.'

'You mean like it was one of those crimes of passion. Like that society woman that shot her feller?'

Paully nodded; 'Something like that.'

'Fancy, somehow you never expect anything like that to happen in your own village.'

'It's always somebody's village or town you know. But thank you again. If we can find the place where the van was parked it will be a great help.'

'Do you want our Dan to go and show you? He usually goes out about this time. He could show you where it was and then walk back. I reckon that he'll be going up that way in any case, over to the Goose Pond to look at his precious nest.'

'It will certainly save us quite a bit of trouble if he would.'

'Oh don't worry about that, he'll love a ride in a car. Here you're to go with the gentleman and show him where the van was.' She helped him on with his jacket, straightening the handkerchief in his top pocket. 'And don't stop out too long now, your dinner won't be very long.'

Watched by the neighbours, Detective Sergeant Paully and Dan left the house and went out to the car. Dan made as if to get into the front seat, next to the driver, but Paully anticipated him, opened the rear door and steered him in by the elbow.

'Drive back up towards Forty Row, I'll tell you when to stop,' he ordered the driver.

The driver noticed the crumbs on Paully's jacket.

'Sergeants!' he muttered to himself scornfully. He was feeling a bit hungry himself and had been able to smell Mrs Cartwright's baking when the door opened. He slipped the car into gear and headed slowly back up the steep lane.

In the shop, Molly and her two customers watched the police car until it was out of sight, then left the window. Molly went back behind the counter and resumed her

knitting. Alice Sidebottom eased her enormous bulk onto an upturned crate of empty mineral water bottles, to take the weight off her swollen calves and ankles. She sat there, breathing heavily, exhausted after standing up for so long. Old Lisa leaned against the counter, thin and active, her grey, withered body still filled with a kind of waspish vitality.

'Did ta see, they took him off.' Alice Sidebottom said gratefully, stretching her aching legs. 'T' bobby had a hold of his arm.'

'He said outside t' door, afore he went in, as how he wanted to ask him some questions about t' murder up at Hall Wood.' Old Lisa took a pinch of herbal snuff out of her little tin box, and sneezed violently over the butter on the counter. 'That means that he's done it all right, no danger. They always say that. Like when somebody's been knocked down, and they have one of they messages on t' wireless. "T' police would like to find t' driver of a black saloon car, who they believe may be able to help them in their inquiries." Huh, never say what they mean outright; don't know why, they never fool nob'dy.'

'Well they took him away right enough,' Molly said, calmly knitting.

'Did you hear what bobby said? It were that Jenny Greenhouse what he killed.'

'Here he were with her yesterday,' old Lisa said, 'walking down t' road with her. Ah were in t' shop here, me and Mary Turner. Does ta remember Molly? Her and that Dan Cartwright come down t' road together and then her come in wi' that there list.'

'List indeed!' Molly said. 'Coming in with lists, like as if we were one of them town shops. Who did she think she was, I'd like to know? Why couldn't she say what she wanted, same as others do? Giving me a list like she were Lady Muck or summat. Suppose that she considered herself too good to talk to us, since she'd been away.'

'Don't know what she had to be stuck up about. Her

coming home with a younker, and what with no wedding ring and all.'

'I think we should be grateful that it was her that he saw off and not some decent girl.' Molly started a new row. 'After all it could have been anybody.'

'You really think as how he's done it then?'

'Well he's daft isn't he? If it weren't him then who were it? We're lucky that they had him copped so quick, cause once they've tasted blood they do it again; there's no holding them back, and who knows who it might have been next.'

'But he always seemed so gentle and harmless like,' Alice Sidebottom said.

'The quiet ones are the worst. They always seem that way until they act. Look at that feller in the Sunday papers with all the women in his cupboards. Everybody said what a nice little feller he was, and all the time he was seeing them off and bricking them up.'

'That's true enough. Course I blame his mother, she should have had him put away long ago. It's no thanks to her that it's not one of us or ours that's in that mortuary right now.'

'That's right.'

Old Lisa took another pinch of snuff, Alice Sidebottom laboured at her breathing, and Molly knitted. Stitch after stitch, row after row the needles clicked, the silver points darting under the guidance of Molly's nimble fingers.

THAT EVENING, Bert Tatlers' pub—the Stag—was packed within half an hour of opening time. Far more people than was usual for Friday; they had heard about the murder over the radio, or read about it in the evening paper, and came rushing into the pub as soon as the door was opened.

The murder had brought them out to congregate, theorize and gossip; it was like the time that Rutledge Rangers won the Rugby League cup. Pints of bitter, mixed and mild; bottles of strong ale, milk stout, Bass and Double X, washed throats, dry with repeating every scrap of information that had come their way, and several that had been invented and retold until they convinced themselves that each rumour was gospel.

Naturally, the Stag was the obvious place to go because Jenny Greenhouse had worked there, and landlords of neighbouring pubs, who hadn't been fortunate enough to have one of their bar staff strangled, stood envious at the doors of their empty houses. At last by about eight-thirty, they resigned themselves to a quiet evening, emptied the contents of the till into their pockets, put on a bow-tie, and left the wife in charge, while they went to the dog-track or one of the many strip-clubs in Rutledge.

And in the Stag, beer and talk flowed freely. Bert Tatlers and his wife pumped busily, and the Stag being short staffed, the glasses piled up empty in the sink, until Bert took on one of the locals, at ten bob and free ale for the evening, to do the washing up.

Several people suggested that it was either a black or a foreigner, and not surprising when they were allowed to

come into the country just as they pleased, to live off the public assistance and send girls out onto the streets. The few old diehards who thought this were in the minority, and nobody took much notice. The foreigners—immigrants from Europe, and the West Indians were familiar enough now, workmates to most men and it was only the occasional crank who still believed that they were a threat to his family and livelihood. The sort of crank who was still prejudiced against the Irish families who had settled in the town before the First World War.

A more popular theory was that teenagers had done it. Every Sunday the newspapers were full of accounts of teenage violence, and the tap room agreed that flogging should be brought back.

But it wasn't until Maurice Sidebottom came in at quarter to seven that the customers of the Stag could build up a really substantial case against anyone.

Maurice Sidebottom lived with his family on the estate, but he had an aunt—Alice Sidebottom—who lived at Barlow Bridge. He was late in the pub because he'd been over to visit her the same as he did every Friday. The council house wasn't big enough to house his expanding family, and three of the Sidebottom girls stayed with the old woman, so every payday, Maurice went across to give her something towards their keep.

'Have you heard about Dan Cartwright being arrested?' he said as soon as he walked in.

'Dan Cartwright?' Everybody crowded round Maurice as he ordered a pint of mild.

'That's right,' he said, as he sipped his drink. 'They took him away in a police car this afternoon. Me Auntie Alice saw them. Said a 'tec went to Cartwrights and said outside t' door as he'd come to make inquiries about t' murder over at Hall Wood. Then he come back out wi' their Dan and put him in t' car. He tried to get away, but t' 'tec had a grip of him. Had him by the elbow with his arm up his back.'

'Get away.'

'It's a fact, I tell you. Aunty Alice were in t' shop next door and she saw it all.'

'Who'd of thought that Dan Cartwright 'ud murder anybody,' somebody said.

'Ah you can never tell what they'll do when they're like him. You never know how they're going to turn. How it's going to take 'em. One day they're all right and the next they're just the other way. I mean we don't know what he were really like do we, he always seemed quiet enough in here but what were he doing on all them walks? We didn't see him then did we?'

'I reckon it was him that's been round my pen killing me little chicks.' The high staccato tones commanded attention amongst the lower pitched, younger voices. 'I seen him hanging around there. Only t' other day he was standing about, when I was getting me lettuce patch dug over. If I hadn't been there, he might o' been in then—I'd found five dead that morning. I reckon he was coming back to finish the rest off, if I hadn't happened to o' been there. He'd been biting 'em too—that shows how crafty he was, making it look like cats had done it see. But cats don't pull down fences.'

The old man shook his head.

'Aye that's how they are see,' Maurice Sidebottom said. 'He'd start with your chickens, and then once he'd tasted blood there'd be no holding him.'

'That's it.'

'What's he like, this maniac o' yours? What's he favour?' A reddened, small, outdoors sort of man, a stranger in the pub, intruded into the company.

'Big, gormless-looking chap; wears a dark suit allus and a check cap. Likes to think he's dressed up—a bit fancy tha' knows; great watch-chain hung wi' bits and pieces, dangling across his weskit and has a walking stick.'

'That's the chap I saw yesterday. That's him to a frazzle! I thought there were some funny business going on then.'

Queerist thing ever. See, I been doing a bit o' caddying up at golf club like, o'er Robby's. Often do a bit up there to make a middling o' brass. And I'm just coming back home yesterday, past that clough down t' road yonder.'

'Trout Clough you mean?'

'Aye, that's it, Trout Clough. Well I'm coming down there, yesterday afternoon—like I says, been doing a bit o' caddying—and I hears three bangs and a lot o' yelling and bawling.'

'Go on!'

'Aye just like that, three bangs—like shots—and then all this shouting. I thought it were a bit funny like and then a bit later I rounds a corner and I sees this feller you're talking about. It were him right enough—watch-chain, stick and all—I was near as close to him as I am to thee now. And he had a gun in his hand, chasing some bits o' kids.'

'Chasing 'em?'

'Aye, haring after 'em he was, with a gun in his hand I tell you—I heard the shots. It were like nothing I ever seen afore. I had a mind to report it but I didn't bother; you know what police are like wi' their questions, I'd never of got home for me tea.'

'A gun and all eh? Just goes to show. Nobody must of been safe, them might of been some of our kids.'

'He should of been put away long ago. Allowed to wander round loose like that, what were t' police doing?'

'Chasing folk after their dog licences most like.'

'Aye.'

Dan was sitting at home telling his father about how he'd had a ride in the big police car and shown them the puddle of oil where the van had been parked.

Detective Sergeant Paully had meticulously traced Harry Morgan's route from the van to the place of the murder. To the despair of his driver, who hadn't had any of Mrs

Cartwright's pie and scones, he spent the whole afternoon wandering around the wood.

He had noticed the grass trodden down in the field where Harry had walked. He had found bits of grass stuck to the barbed wire fence, showing that somebody had pressed it down to the ground whilst climbing over. He had found traces of wool off Jenny's coat and skirt, plucked off by the brambles as she had walked through the thick undergrowth.

Paully spent the early part of the evening walking around the estate. Whenever he saw a van he made a few discreet inquiries. Sometimes asking somebody standing nearby, sometimes approaching the driver himself if he was available—usually on some pretext or other; several van drivers were infuriated because an officious young detective made them move their vehicles and show their driving licences, for no apparent reason except to display his authority.

At about six o'clock Paully went into the central police station and spent some time in the traffic department. Then he sat down at his desk in the C.I.D. room and wrote out two reports. One was for Aldwych, one for himself—it was no use trying to convince Aldwych of his theories about the murderer being a local man, so in the report to the inspector he didn't mention the results of his inquiries about vans. The report simply stated that he had traced the route of the murderer, from a vehicle parked at the back of the wood. His own personal report he locked up in his desk, the other he typed out and then took in to Aldwych. Aldwych was filling in his football coupon, in a hurry to catch the last post. He only grunted when Paully gave him the report.

Paully walked out of the station. He'd done all that he could for the time being. He decided to jack it in for the day and go to the pictures.

Doctor Milson was presenting a rose to a fashionable young lady in the foyer of the Rutldge Playhouse.

Detective Inspector Aldwych finished his pools, sealed

the envelope, and then called in a police constable and briefed him to go to the theatre and bring Milson back so that he could ask him whether Jenny had been pregnant. He felt that he would be able to enjoy his inevitable night's drinking all the better after finding that out.

There were two Stag Hotels in Rutledge, and an elderly police constable in plain clothes for the first time stood at the bar of the wrong one, enjoying pints of beer paid for by the watch committee and keeping his ears open for what no one was going to say.

SATURDAY MORNING. On the estate at Barlowmoor, the day of the great car washing, ready for trips out on the following Sunday. The day of gardening, hedge trimming, greyhound exercising, pigeon fancying and do-it-yourself.

This Saturday, the usual activity was punctuated by talk about the murder. Neighbours swapped their morning papers, comparing accounts, adding their own tit-bits of information: he was seen with a gun—been strangling chickens—shooting at some boys—drinking the blood like a cannibal—took him off in a police car, had him handcuffed.

And in the papers no mention of arrest, or of Dan. Only the same pictures, forwarded by the press agency at Rutledge; of Hall Wood, damp and ominous in the morning sun; of Jenny, taken when she was fifteen, young and innocent-looking in a tartan dress, her hair tied round with ribbon; of Jenny's mother, grim, stern and martyred, sitting up in bed in her high-necked night-gown. Only one paper had sent its own representative and, desperate to find a different angle, displayed a picture of Jenny's little boy. Huge-eyed and pathetic-looking, held by a calm, impersonal-faced, welfare-worker. Under the photograph was the inspired caption:

'A DEED OF DEATH DONE ON THE INNOCENT—OUT ON THEE MURDERER!!'—coined by a literary-minded sub-editor, and then a lot of blurb about young children being the true sufferers from such deeds; hurriedly re-phrased from a feature on a film star's recent divorce case.

No mention of an arrest, or of Dan. Only the bare statement:

'Said a police spokesman yesterday evening: "We are

anxious to trace the driver of a vehicle which was seen parked near the scene of the crime, between the hours of three and five on Thursday afternoon. We think he may be able to help us with our inquiries.””

What did they want him for? Hadn't the police got the man? Wasn't it Dan Cartwright? He was mad wasn't he? —it was obvious, an open and shut case.

What an excitement on the estate, the men, the women, talking; the children, shouting, screaming, running around: 'Yah you're the murderer, Samson is the murderer, great big bum, see the hangman come, take him to Sing-Sing, see Samson swing.'

At 18 Campbell Drive, Johnny Starter's mother, oblivious, was putting up sandwiches.

'Will you be bringing Dan back for tea Johnny?' she called.

'Probably Mam,' Johnny shouted back. He was upstairs, carefully packing the specimen jars and microscope slides into his haversack.

'I'll have something ready for you then.' Mrs Starter began to wrap up the sandwiches in tissue paper.

'Do you think you will have enough here?' she asked Johnny when he came down stairs, 'I've put you up four cheese and six egg and filled you a thermos of coffee.'

'I'll never eat all that.'

'Well if you don't I'm sure that Dan will. I've noticed that you never bring anything back, and you're always hungry enough when you get home. Now then have you got a sweater with you? It gets cold over on those tops.'

'Yes Mam.'

'Well you'd better take your scarf as well. Here you are.' She wrapped the scarf round his neck, tucking the ends under his jacket, as he picked up the bundle of sandwiches and the flask of coffee. 'You'll be back when I see you I suppose?'

'That's right Mam.' Johnny laughed.

‘Well be careful, don’t go climbing any rocks.’

She kissed him on the cheek. ‘Here wait a moment, I’d better give you some money in case you want to buy some sweets or something.’

‘It’s all right Mam. I’ve got three shillings, and there’s no shops where we’re going.’

‘Well you had better have something all the same, just in case. You never know, you might get stuck somewhere, and want to get a bus.’ She gave Johnny a ten-shilling note. ‘Now put that away carefully somewhere, and remember that it’s not to spend. It’s just for emergencies.’

‘Right-o Mam.’ Johnny put it in the back pocket of his jeans and fastened the zip.

Mrs Starter kissed him again, then waved as he walked down the garden path and along the road.

Johnny’s father was a geologist and worked with an oil company in the Middle East. He was only home for three months of the year. The rest of the time there was just Mrs Starter and Johnny. Johnny had always been a solitary boy, preferring to go walking on his own rather than play with the other children of his own age. Mrs Starter was glad that he had formed such a friendship with Dan. It made her mind much easier to know that he had Dan with him when he was out on the moors. After all one was always reading in the papers about young boys being attacked or kidnapped, even murdered. No one would be likely to bother Johnny with big Dan around.

Nat Kershaw and his gang were playing at the Goose Pond. They were throwing stones at a floating tin can, trying to sink it, pretending that it was an enemy battleship and they were shelling it from the shore. Nat saw Johnny walking down the lane.

‘Hey look lads,’ he said. ‘There goes Johnny Starter, the big fat snob. Betcha he knows something about the murder. He’s allus wi’ Samson in’t he?’

They ran after Johnny, whooping and shouting, making

noises like Red Indians on the pictures. Johnny hurried on, ignoring them, clutching at his haversack; but they soon caught up with him, forcing him to stop, surrounding him, hemming him in. He tried to push past, but they held him back, shoving him against the bank and holding him down.

'Yah what price now stuck-up, now that your mate's a murderer,' Nat said. The red, dirty faces wove in front of Johnny, thrusting at him, sneering, calling him names. Fingers grabbed at his clothing and his hair, tugging his head back.

Nat Kershaw seized his scarf and wrenched it tight around his neck.

'See how they'm going to hang him. Just like that.' He pulled the scarf tighter so that Johnny could hardly breathe. 'Going to hang Samson.'

'They're not,' Johnny choked. 'Why would they want to hang him?'

'Coz he murdered that bint up in Hall Wood. That's why see. Bet he had a do with her first.' Nat let go of the scarf and made a sign with his fingers. Forming the thumb and first finger of his left hand into a circle, and pushing the big finger of his right hand through, moving it in and out. 'Bet he done her stiff first.'

The other boys all laughed loudly.

'He didn't, he didn't, he didn't.' Johnny tried to get free, but they held him down.

'Yeah he did, in Hall Wood, strangled her. Like that see.' Nat got hold of the scarf and pulled it tight again. 'Like that.' He gave the scarf a jerk.

'He didn't. Dan wouldn't murder anybody.' Johnny was almost in tears but determined not to give them the satisfaction of seeing him cry.

Nat let go of the scarf. He pushed his face close to Johnny's.

'Why'd they arrest him then?'

'They never arrested him, they didn't! ' Johnny loosened the knot in his scarf.

‘Yeah they did, coppers took him off in a car yesterday afternoon.’

‘Well they weren’t arresting him see. Dan saw a van on the lane and they wanted to know where. It was the murderer’s van and Dan saw it so there!’

‘How do you know?’

‘Coz I saw Dan last night and he told me,’ Johnny said triumphantly.

Nat stepped back, temporarily at a loss. The other boys let go of Johnny and looked expectantly at their leader. Waiting.

‘He’s lying.’ Nat decided. ‘He’s a dirty, rotten, stinking, bloody liar. That’s all he is.’

‘Yeah he’s lying, that’s it,’ they chorused. ‘Nowt but a big fat liar.’

‘No I am not,’ Johnny insisted. ‘I’m going down for him now, to go on the moors; so there!’

‘He’s lying the shithouse, he’s lying. Bet he wouldn’t swear it on a Bible,’ somebody said.

‘I would too.’

‘We’ll find out whether he’s lying soon enough. We’ll go wi’ ’im and see. Then if he’s lying, we’ll give it to ’im proper. Come on lads.’

They set off in a procession down the lane, jostling and pushing Johnny. Bumping against him, trying to trip him up by treading on his heels, grabbing at his haversack and spinning him round until he was dizzy. They attracted the attention of other boys, hanging about, curious, near Hall Wood, and soon there were thirty of them. Shouting, singing the hanging song:

‘Samson is a murderer,
Samson is a murderer,
Great big bum, ‘
See the hangman come,
Take him to Sing-Sing,
See Samson swing.’

At the railway tracks they all stopped, spreading out, forming a line across the road.

Nat Kershaw pushed Johnny and pointed to Dan's house. 'Go on then, knock at the door. We'm going to see whether he comes out or not then.'

Johnny walked across the tracks. His shoes had nails in them to save wear on his moorland walks, and they scraped on the cobbles. He realized that he was dragging his feet, and straightened himself up, walking more jauntily.

He clenched his fist and rapped with his knuckles on the door. Mrs Cartwright opened it.

'Come in Johnny, come on in lad. You're later than usual. Dan's been ready for half an hour and more.'

Inside, Dan was sitting in front of the fire, holding his packet of sandwiches, wrapped in newspaper. His cap was on his head, his stick in his hand.

'Ayah Johnny,' he said.

'Hullo Dan.'

'Well come on then, let's be having you on your way, let me get my work done.' Mrs Cartwright said. 'Here you are Johnny, you take this in case Dan wants to buy some toffee or summat on the way.' She gave Johnny half-a-crown. 'You better look after it for him, otherwise he'll just be holding it in his hand all day, making himself feel miserable, for fear he loses it.'

Johnny and Dan left the house and walked into the lane, turning right, away from where Nat Kershaw and the rest were still standing by the old tracks.

'We'll go up the brook,' Johnny told Dan. 'Past the old engine shed, through Raven Vale and over Trout Clough onto Robby's.'

They walked along the lane, past Molly's, until they came to the brook. Then squeezed through the stile at the side of the bridge and walked along the bank. They walked upstream until the valley narrowed, steep rocks on their right, the swift stream on their left, so that they had to walk in single file along the narrow path.

Back at the end of the village street, Nat Kershaw and the rest of the boys stood frustrated.

'He weren't lying,' one boy said, 'that were Samson reet enough.'

They all looked at Nat. Nat the leader. Waiting for him to give his opinion.

Nat wasn't going to be cheated of his sport so easily. He stood thinking, feet splayed apart, chewing at his thumb.

'Samson must have escaped, that's what,' he said at last. 'We'll go after 'em. Take 'em in.'

'Do you think we can?'

'Course, I ain't afeared o' Samson,' Nat said scornfully. 'Any road, I gotten me gun here.' He produced the air-pistol from under his windjammer. 'Come on lads, they've gone up Raven Vale. We can cut across t' fields and meet 'em at t' other end. Some on us can get on top o' t' rocks and shy stones down, while rest on us stop 'em coming along t' path.'

The gang set off. Running back up the lane and then across the fields, led by Nat, his air-pistol loaded in his hand.

Dan and Johnny walked up the gorge, between the steep shale walls and overhanging rocks. Just before the path shrank to a muddy strip of turf between the brown rushing stream and the overhanging cliff, there was a weir of tumbled, mossy stone. From the deep pool behind the weir, a shallow channel had been cut beside the path, to carry water to the old engine house, where the steam pumps used to be. The steam pumps that worked day and night, to drain the pit. Now the engine shed was long disused, the machinery removed, the roof gaping open to the sky; and it stood, built of huge blocks of stone; like a solitary tooth, carious in the grey gum of shale between the now stagnant channel and the stream.

Local legend held that the engine house was haunted by boggarts. Once a firebeater had gone mad there, and hanged himself from one of the beams that still remained, firmly bedded in the solid stone. From the Barlow Bridge

side the building appeared intact, apart from the glassless, vacant windows. But one of the other walls was completely demolished, and the fourth half shattered, the fallen masonry tumbled into the deep firehole.

Johnny and Dan passed the engine shed and walked on, picking their way carefully along the narrow, treacherous, uneven path; deeper into the constricting vale.

Near the end of the gorge, their feet slipping on the grey shale, damp with the stream's spray, they heard the crack of an air-pistol.

The slug struck a stone near Johnny's foot, and ricocheted, whining, past Dan.

'We got you,' Nat Kershaw shouted. He was lying behind a boulder about twenty yards away, reloading his pistol. They saw the other boys, like sentinels, lining the top of the cliffs; stones and sods in their hands.

'What do you want?' Johnny asked. Dan pushed behind him, peering over his shoulder to see.

'We want Samson, he's a murderer. We'm going to take him in. They'm going to hang him.'

Two of the boys on the cliff top pushed a boulder down at them. Johnny dragged Dan aside, out of the way, as it bounced past, smashing onto the path with a smell of brimstone, and eventually coming to rest half-way across the stream.

'Watch out, you might have killed us!'

Nat took no notice of Johnny, but carefully aimed his pistol, holding the weapon steady with both hands. The slug hit Johnny's haversack and glanced off the sturdy canvas.

'I got him, I hit him,' Nat shouted exultantly.

The boys above them started to cob down their ammunition of sods and stones. Johnny pulled Dan into the shelter of a shallow cave in the cliff wall and they huddled together, crouched, as a second boulder came hurtling down, bringing an avalanche of loose shale with it. Long after the boulder had rolled into the stream beside the first, the shale

continued to trickle past the mouth of the cave, spattering onto the path with a sound like heavy rain.

'They'll cause a landslide soon,' Johnny said.

'What they want to chuck things at us for?' Dan mumbled.

'They're after you, it's Nat Kershaw's gang. They're saying that you killed that girl up at Hall Wood.'

'I wouldna,' Dan said. 'I wouldna.'

Johnny poked his head out of the cave and Nat fired a third time; too quickly, his shot went wildly astray. A boy jumped out from behind a rock on the other side of the stream and lobbed a sod of grass, hitting Johnny in the face.

'We'll go back down the gorge,' he said, wiping the dirt out of his eyes. 'We can get out at the far end.'

They darted out of the cave and ran along the bank, back down the vale. Nat came after them, his pistol in his hand, and the boys on the cliff-top started scrambling down.

When they reached the engine house, Johnny and Dan saw the three boys crossing the top of the weir. Their retreat was cut off!

'Quick, in here.' Johnny pushed Dan into the engine house, and they dropped down into the open firehole.

'We'm got 'em now,' Nat shouted. 'They can't get out past us. We'm got 'em trapped.'

The gang assembled behind him, picking up handfuls of shale, sods and stones.

'Right-o lads, ready—fire.' The gang all whooped and and lobbed their missiles into the firehole. 'Quick lads, get some more ammo.'

Inside the firehole the dirt and stones showered down on Dan and Johnny. One boy had thrown an empty bottle that he'd found and it burst with an explosive sound on the wall behind them, scattering fragments of glass. Dan was shaking, beads of sweat running down his massive face.

'We've got to get out of here,' Johnny said. 'Through

there! ' He pointed to the old flue. ' We can get through without them seeing us.'

Johnny led the way on his hands and knees, into the dark opening, Dan following heavily behind. The flue had once led along and up to a chimney on the top of the crag, but now the chimney was gone, and after creeping for twenty yards, Johnny and Dan came into the open where the flue had caved in. The engine house still sheltered them from the gang, who were still on the far side, throwing stones and sods.

' Up there,' Johnny said, pointing to the crag. The cliffs weren't so forbidding near the engine shed, little more than steep shale slopes at the foot, and half-way up, where Johnny was pointing, a small hanging valley or gully split the steep wall of rock above.

Johnny and Dan assaulted the cliff, scrambling up the loose shale. The first few feet were easy, then the going became more difficult as the shale steepened until it was almost vertical. They had to scratch holds with their fingernails, scrabbling up the insecure face, kicking with their feet, using knees and elbows. They had almost reached the lip of the gully before one of the gang spotted them.

' Hey, they're up yonder,' a boy shouted.. ' They must of gotten out.'

' The flue, they must have gone through the flue.'

Nat came running round the corner of the engine house and fired wildly at Dan and Johnny, the shot singing harmlessly over their heads. The gang ran to the foot of the cliff, but Johnny and Dan had already pulled themselves into the gully, and were hurrying along the dry bed, struggling over the boulders that occasionally blocked their way, sometimes having to crawl on hands and knees under some great block of stone that completely bridged the narrow cleft.

Below, Nat reloaded his pistol, pushed it into the waistband of his jeans and led his gang up the steep cliff. There were too many of them, and they tried to get up the shale

too fast, impeding one another, tumbling about; often advancing a few feet up the loose stuff only to slide down again, grabbing at each other and pulling each other back.

When at last they did get into the gully, panting and dirty, Johnny and Dan were already out of sight. Still getting in each other's way in the confined womb of the valley, the gang set off after them. They clambered, hot and sweating, over the boulders and under the chockstones, barking their knees, elbows, shins until the blood ran down their thin arms and legs, ignoring the pain in the excitement of the chase. Occasionally they would get a glimpse of Dan or Johnny, high up the gully, and they would cry out:

'There they go. That's them,' and Nat might take a snap shot with his pistol, forgetting the weapon's limited range. This slowed the gang more than ever, because they all had to stop and wait while he reloaded.

At the top they saw Johnny and Dan haring across the fields towards the railway lines.

'There they are, after them.'

Johnny and Dan fled desperately. They had a good start now, but they could still hear their persecutors coming after them. They careered through the fields, jumping ditches, blundering through hedges that tore their clothes and skin. When they reached the railway they climbed through the barbed-wire fence.

'That way!'

Johnny pointed to the right, towards the great stone viaduct that spanned the valley. They hurried down the track, stumbling from sleeper to sleeper. Before and behind them, the line stretched, a long narrow ribbon.

The gang were coming over the fence, and clattering after them, whooping, filling the track. Johnny and Dan ran across the viaduct, feeling the wind on their hot faces, suspended in space, only the noise of their boots on the sleepers, the shouts of the gang behind them and the sound of the wind, moaning in the arches and whistling in the signal wires. The viaduct seemed to go on for ever, and

they were tired now, losing ground. A hundred and fifty feet below they could see the valley bottom, the old factories like broken toys, the brook, silver as a twisted strip of tinsel.

‘What if a puffer comes?’ Dan managed to mumble.

Johnny didn’t answer.

At last they staggered to the end of the bridge and jumped off the track, slithering down a steep cinder slope into the yard of a derelict mill.

Hurrying across the weed-covered cobbles they ducked through a hole in the broken wall, dropping a few feet to the floor of the empty workshop. Inside it was dark and cool.

They lay there panting, hardly able to get their breath, as the gang slid after them down the cinder slope and gathered in the yard.

‘Must be around here somewhere,’ Nat said. He cupped his hands to his lips and shouted. ‘Might as well call it barley and come out, we’ll get you anyway.’

His voice echoed round the empty buildings.

‘All right then, we’ll come in and get you. Here lads, grab some of these.’ He wrenched one of the iron rails out of its socket in the rusting lodge gate. The rail was pointed at the top, shaped like a spearhead. Nat weighed the weapon in his hand. ‘Come on lads, we’ll show ’em, spread out and search the whole mill. If you spot ’em give a shout.’

The gang armed themselves with the iron rails, advancing on the old factory. Johnny tugged at Dan’s sleeve and led him across the dark broken floor. They could hear water dripping somewhere, and their feet were noisy on the rough stone. A face appeared in the hole that they had come through. They froze.

‘They’re in here somewhere. I can hear ’em walking about.’

‘Sure that it’s them an’ not rats?’

‘I could hear their footprints I tell you—get a light an’ we’ll see what we’re doing.’

Johnny's eyes were used to the dark by this time and he noticed a faint glow in a far corner.

'Over there,' he whispered. They moved cautiously towards the corner, but in spite of all their care, they couldn't help making some noise on the refuse-littered floor.

'There you are, what did I tell you!' a triumphant voice called out behind them. 'That's 'em all right.'

Somebody threw a stone. It landed, clattering noisily in the darkness. Johnny and Dan reached the corner. The light filtered from the entrance to a passage, half blocked by a stack of old machinery. They squeezed through and saw daylight at the far end. The passage led to the main building of the factory; the roof and floors gone, only the shell remained, the four walls towering up, perforated by a pattern of boarded-up windows. Tall weeds grew amongst the piles of rusty machinery and old timbers that lay scattered about the ground. As Johnny and Dan picked their way through the lumber, they could hear the shouts of Nat and the others groping around in the dark room behind.

They easily tore the rotten boards off one of the lower windows and climbed through. Outside, they were beside the stream again. There was a pipe leading across to the other side, and they straddled it, thrusting their way over.

'Here Johnny.' Dan pointed up the hill-side to the entrance of a disused culvert which he remembered having walked through during his wanderings. Running to the mouth of the culvert, they slipped inside.

'Do you know where it comes out?' Johnny asked.

'Over in t' valley behind Forty Row,' Dan said.

'Right, come on.'

They scurried along the culvert towards the pin-point of light at the further end. Dan had to crouch in the low tunnel and could not move as fast as Johnny who could run along upright. Johnny kept tugging at him to hurry. Soon the pin-point became a circle that grew larger and larger until they emerged into the open once more. They

were in a small, overgrown valley that showed evidence of once having been used for tipping refuse. The culvert was only there as an outlet in case of the overflowing of a stream that flowed into a larger tunnel a few feet below. They sat down on the dry concrete bed.

'I think we've shook them off,' Johnny said. 'But they'll be after us again. Listen Dan we've got to go away and hide out somewhere until the police find out who really did it.'

'Go away?'

'On the moors. Got to escape. Now I've got some money for food, but we'll need other things, blankets, candles, stove. You wait here while I go home for them. I can soon get there across the fields and my mam will be out shopping yet. Have to leave a note for Mam too—explaining. Now whatever you do keep out of sight. If anybody comes, hide out in the tunnel. I'll leave the haversack here.'

Dan nodded. Johnny gave him the haversack to look after and set off, out of the valley and across the fields to the estate.

Dan sat on the cold concrete by the edge of the stream, breaking off stalks of grass and throwing them down into the water, watching them float away. His mind was confused, he wasn't sure what was going on, why everyone was chasing them, why they had to go away. But if Johnny said so then they must. Going on the moors Johnny said. Him and Johnny living on the moors with the sheep. That would be all right. Dan broke off another stalk and threw it into the stream, watching it, whirled by the eddies in the brown water, whipped away into the dark tunnel, disappearing for ever.

A quarter of a mile away, Nat and the rest of the gang were still searching the ruined factory. After a while they gave it up.

'They must of gotten away,' Nat said.

'Shall we look for 'em?'

'Aw they could be miles away by now.' Nat threw his

spear at a stray cat, prowling the yard. The cat dodged, whirled and spat, then leapt, quick and agile through a broken window, dignity outraged. The gang could see the green eyes glaring at them from the darkness behind the dusty, shattered pane.

‘Here, let’s go and see what cops are doing up at Hall Wood.’

The gang left the mill yard and set off up the lane. One of them found an empty can, and they kicked it along in front of them, playing a rough, undisciplined form of football, knocking each other out of the way to kick the tin.

AT HOME Johnny Starter got his rucksack out from underneath the bed in his room. Carefully he folded up four blankets from the airing cupboard, placing them in the rucksack so that they took up as little space as possible. He searched in his mother's sewing basket for safety pins. With safety pins, he and Dan could fasten the blankets up to make sleeping bags. They would keep them much warmer that way, during the cold nights.

Groundsheets! They would have to have groundsheets to keep the damp off. Johnny had one from when he'd been camping with the Scouts, but what about Dan?

The plastic shower curtain from out of the bathroom, that would do.

Johnny went into the bathroom and pulled it off the hooks, then rolled it up and stuffed it with his own groundsheet on top of the blankets. There was no room in the main pocket of the rucksack for anything more and he fastened up the drawcord at the neck.

And pans—they'd want something to cook in. Johnny went into the kitchen, picked up the frying-pan, and selected a couple of small saucepans. He found some string and tied the pans, with his primus to the outside of the rucksack. The primus was full of paraffin, he'd checked that.

A sharp knife would be very handy too, and a tin-opener, a tin opener would be essential. And plates and spoons. Johnny took a pillow-slip off his bed and dropped the cutlery into it, then he went to the pantry and filled the pillow-case up with all the foodstuff he could find; his mother wouldn't mind, he was sure of that.

Now was there anything else? Of course cups, there was one on the thermos flask but they'd need another; he found a tin pudding basin in the kitchen, that would have to do. And coffee, of course they would want something to drink, and that meant sugar too. He went to the cupboard and found a bottle of coffee essence and a pound bag of sugar; he couldn't put them in the pillow-slip with the tinned stuff—the bottle might break or the bag burst. Eventually he found room for them in the side pocket of his rucksack, the other side pocket he filled with candles and an electric torch.

Now the note. That was everything except the note. He tore a page out of one of his school exercise books and wrote carefully with the fountain pen he'd had off his father for Christmas:

Johnny Starter,
18 Campbell Drive,
Barlowmoor Estate,
Rutledge,
Lancashire,
England,
Europe,
The World,
The Universe.

Dear Mam,

Everybody is saying that Dan has done the murder so we're going to go away and hide out until they find who's really done it and clear his name. We'll be camping out on the moors in a secret den we found where nobody will ever find us. We have plenty of food and the ten shillings you gave me and half a crown off Mrs Cartwright, so ~~we~~'ll be all right. I've taken four blankets and the shower curtains so we'll be warm at night. Don't worry, we'll be back as soon as they catch the man who did it.

He thought about signing it, but he wasn't sure whether to put 'sincerely' or 'faithfully', so he didn't bother.

Putting the note on the dresser, where his mother would be sure to see it, he put his rucksack on his back, picked up the pillow-slip and went out by the kitchen door, climbing over the back garden fence and walking briskly, the way that he'd come, across the fields.

When he reached the valley, Dan was still sitting where he had left him at the entrance to the culvert. Johnny scrambled down to his side.

'Here Dan, you take the pillow-slip and the haversack, I'll carry the rucker.' Dan obediently slung the haversack over his shoulder and picked up the pillow-slip carrying it tucked underneath one arm.

'Do you think I oughter go home and tell me mam first?' he asked slowly.

'There isn't time,' Johnny said. 'Anyway my mother will tell her where we are.'

They set off through the culvert, back to the valley and up the other side. Keeping a wary eye open in case Nat Kershaw and his gang were still about, they walked along the top of the crags along Raven Vale and then dropped into Trout Clough.

Following the stream at the bottom, and keeping out of sight of anyone on the golf course, they hugged the clough as they ascended to Robby's. Gradually the trees thinned out, becoming smaller and stunted, as the clough grew shallower and offered less protection from the moorland winds. The grass gave way to bracken, the fresh shoots pale and green, amongst the old gold remnants, burnt by the last year's autumn sun. Then the bracken in turn gave way to heather and the soil became peatier, the path more rocky under foot. Imperceptibly the clough had become no more than a channel worn in the hill-side by the stream, bustling and tumbling noisily over green, moss-covered rocks. The water was icy cold, numbing their fingers when they bent, and scooped it up to drink.

They drank frequently, as they always did at moorland streams. Unable to refuse the water's bubbling invitation, they splashed the cool liquid over their faces and swished it round their mouths until the cold made their teeth ache. The stream seemed to demand it from them.

After following the stream for a mile up the hill-side, they came to a rough track that crossed the watercourse and meandered between dry stone walls to Robby's. They turned along the track, zig-zagging up the hill-side, which was bare and stony.

The track turned a final corner and ended abruptly in a small quarry, a basin cut out of the hill-side to provide stone for the folly just above. In the bottom of the quarry was a shallow pool of black peaty water.

'You wait here,' Johnny said. He took off his rucksack and placed it on a rock. 'You watch that, while I make sure that everything's all clear.'

Dan obediently sat down in the shelter of the quarry. Johnny walked round the pool, scrambled up a shallow corner in the back wall and disappeared. Dan could hear the scraping of his bootnails as he walked across the rocky ground on top. After a minute or two Johnny's head appeared over the top of the quarry: 'Right, nobody in sight, pass the gear up.'

Dan picked up the rucksack and the pillow-case. He carried them round the pool and handed them to Johnny, then placed his hands on top of the rock and pulled himself heavily up beside him.

On top the wind blew over the flat moorland, whipping up the dry peat so that it stung their faces. Peat dunes, capped by tufts of lank, yellowed cotton grass, stretched on over the rolling hills, and strange blackened rock outcrops, sculptured by the wind, jutted from the moor like petrified monsters.

Johnny and Dan trudged past the folly and set off across the moor. At first the ground was stony, but after a hundred yards they were sinking almost to their ankles in the soft

peat. They were used to walking over moorland and did not try to follow a straight line, which would have meant climbing over the dunes, a tiring business on the surface of loose peat. Instead they began to follow one of the water-courses that wound between the dunes, cleaving the peat down to the bedrock, which made a firm if wet footpath. They walked along in silence, saving their breath for the long tramp ahead, their feet splashing in the shallow water, their heavy boots crunching the gravel. The leather straps of Johnny's rucksack creaked, and far away they heard a curlew's soft call and the lonely bleating of a solitary sheep.

Two miles of hiking brought them to the watershed, a flat heather platform, three hundred yards square, broken by narrow runnels that carried the water to the gullies, then to the streams and eventually the deep valleys on either side of the hill.

A startled grouse darted from the heather almost at their feet. It flew low, wings flapping furiously, growling its harsh protest; disturbing a large hare that went bounding, zigety-zag across the watershed and over the mounds of peat, vanishing into the gullies, then bobbing white again on top of the distant dunes, before it finally disappeared.

'It's nearly four, we'd better eat,' Johnny said. They sat down in the shelter of the cairn of piled stones that marked the highest point of the hill. The sandwiches were taken out of the haversack and they munched steadily, the long walk over rough country had given them a good appetite.

After they had finished the sandwiches, they drank the hot coffee out of Johnny's thermos. Then Johnny consulted his map.

'If we follow the gullies down that way,' he pointed across the moor towards a faint hill in the distance, 'we'll come to a stream that will lead us to Gunnel Stones, just on the other side of Deacon Pike there. At Gunnel Stones there's a cave where we can set up camp for the night.'

Johnny selected a gully to follow, and they packed the haversack and set off. At first the gully was only a shallow

depression, but it soon became deeper and wider, as the stream in the bottom was fed by others which flowed in from either side, and they found themselves walking along a flat bed of solid stone. Great overlapping slabs of rock, forming giant steps over which the water danced and bubbled. The steps became steeper and higher, making waterfalls that Johnny and Dan had to climb down, slithering over the rough millstone grit. At the bottom of each waterfall they had to traverse a deep pool, sometimes being able to get round the edge quite easily, other times having to search carefully for hand and footholds on the overhanging rocks that lined the valley. The valley was a deep cleft now, dropping steeply between heathery walls until it joined another, larger valley at right angles.

The second valley was flatter, the wide bottom littered with tumbled boulders, perched crazily one on top of the other in a weird labyrinth through which the stream wound, often losing itself in a hundred separate trickles before reforming. Between two boulders Johnny and Dan saw the remains of a dead sheep, the bones of the thin legs protruding from the bloated, grey woolly body; the horns rotting on the skull which still had some remnants of torn flesh clinging to it, the picked eye-sockets turned empty to the sky.

It was going dark and chilly, strangely quiet, deep in the Pennines, with only the scraping of their bootnails on the rock. They rounded a corner of the great valley. Ahead was a steep rock buttress, towering between two tributary streams that tumbled down from the left. Johnny pointed to the buttress.

‘Gunnel Stones,’ he said.

They crossed the stream, hopping from boulder to boulder.

‘We’d better get some water here, there’s none on top.’ Johnny bent down, rinsed his thermos flask and filled it. The soft sound of the brook seemed loud and lonely in the dusk. ‘We’ll be at the cave soon,’ Johnny said. He shivered

at the sudden cold of the coming night. 'We'll be all right there when we've had a brew or some hot soup.'

They scrambled up the scree to the foot of the rocks. Johnny knew the way to go. The rocks were in two tiers, but the lower one was split by a deep chimney that went far back. Johnny led the way up the chimney's sandy bed, right into the bowels of the crag where it turned under a chockstone and they were able to scramble up a detached, inclined slab to the heather ledge below the main cliff. They walked along the sloping ledge until they came to the cave. The cave was formed beneath an overhanging pinnacle and had originally been exposed on three sides, but climbers had built a wall of stones around it so as to make a cosy bivouac. Inside, a bed of heather and bracken had been laid down on the sandy floor.

Johnny crawled through the low entrance and lit a candle. 'We'll be fine in here.' He placed the candle on a ledge. 'Pass the gear in.'

Soon they had the primus going and warmed up a tin of soup. They sat in the entrance of the cave, dipping their bread in the steaming liquid. It had gone quite dark and from their high position they could see, far away, the occasional headlights of cars on the main Lancashire—Yorkshire highway.

'They'll never find us here,' Johnny said. 'You could live up here for ever and they wouldn't find you.'

Afterwards they had a brew. Then Johnny showed Dan how to pin his blankets together to make a sleeping bag. They stretched out on the bed of heather and bracken. Tired, worn out by the day's activity, they soon fell asleep when Johnny blew the candle out, and they lay oblivious in the small cave, breathing gently the fresh moorland air.

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR ALFRED ALDWYCH was doing extra duty—he was sitting in the snug of the George and Dragon, near Rutledge's town centre, questioning the wife of a known criminal as to her husband's whereabouts.

'Over in Manchester you say?'

'That's right deary, dealing "chemmy" at a club.' The woman sipped her gin and bitter lemon. She was a large, generously built, synthetic blonde, just past forty and still with her own teeth—a row of tiny off-white stumps, like faulted pearls between her slack ruby lips. Her mouth looked slightly askew, because the thick lipstick had been smeared as she drank. Her large face was smooth and bland, powdered pink, her cheeks roughed to the complexion of a peach, and like a peach, fuzzy—covered with fine down-like hairs, encroaching on her upper lip, promising in old age a luxurious moustache. She was attractive still, in a big sort of way, and Aldwych liked his women big.

'You're sure that he ~~won't~~ be back tonight?' He licked his lips in anticipation of the unstaying of her great belly and respondent hips. 'If he found us together and decided to get naughty, he might be able to make it very awkward for a man in my position.'

'He won't be able to come back if you was to telephone Manchester City police and tell 'em what he was doing and where at. Tip 'em off like.'

'Here, that's an idea, I never thought of that, they'll have him inside in no time. Do you know the address of the place?'

'Certainly, there's not much about his goings on that I don't know, even though he might think otherwise. I keep

my eyes open and my ears washed out. Here we are, I got it writ out on a bit o' paper somewhere.' She rummaged in her pretentious, white plastic handbag, emptying a mess of make-up, bus tickets, and bits of straps and fasteners of underwear onto the table. 'Ah this is it, I found it in his pants pocket when I was looking for a bob for the gas meter.' She brought out a piece of thin cheap paper that looked like a page torn from a notebook. 'Fourteen Cassidy Street, Moss Side. A newsagent's shop it's supposed to be, but Manchester Police'll find plenty for t' Sunday papers if they go upstairs. A proper little Monte Carlo they've got it fitted up as—hostesses, roulette tables, everything. Even a bar, with waiters in monkey suits to serve the drinks.'

'Fourteen Cassidy Street eh? We'll just have another one, then I'll get on the blower to Manchester. Soon as they hear about this, we can stop worrying about him bursting in on us tonight.'

'That's right love.' She kissed him floppily on the cheek. 'Then we'll get a bottle of gin and go back to my place eh? Gin always tastes a lot better when you know that you haven't to go out in the cold again after.'

'Won't be cold where I'm going I hope.' Aldwych grinned and put his hand on the top of her fat thigh, thrusting his fingers into the warm groove of her groin, just below her girdle, squeezing the soft mass of pulsating flesh through the thin material of her dress.

She giggled loudly: 'Nobody's ever caught the flu up there yet.'

'Or owt else I hope,' Aldwych said.

'Here what do you mean. I'll have you know that I keep myself very clean,' she said indignantly. 'I'm not on the game you know and you don't catch me letting every Tom, Dick or Harry start and go messing about with me. And what about me catching summat? I don't want to be laid up with one of your brats for Christmas—I'm not past it yet you know.' She pushed Aldwych's hand away and hunched along the red plush seat away from him.

'There love, only kidding. Only my fun, just a bit of a joke. Here, let's have another drink.' Aldwych emptied his glass and pressed the bell to summon the waiter. 'Gin and bitter lemon, and a pint of black and tan,' he ordered. 'With stout.'

'Well it's not my idea of a joke,' the woman said when the waiter had gone back to the bar to get the drinks. 'Casting aspersions like that.'

'Oh come on love, I didn't mean nothing by it.' Aldwych put his arm round her shoulders and drew her back towards him.

'Well it's not a very nice thing to say is it?' she pouted, but she was responsive again.

'I've said I'm sorry haven't I love, and I promise not to talk like that any more. Come on love make up, give us a kiss.'

'All right then.' She kissed him on the mouth, her lips open, her little tongue, like a blind searching slug, flopping over his teeth. She broke away. 'Here stop it, the waiter will see us.'

The waiter arrived with the drinks. Aldwych paid him, then picked up his pint and gulped the black mixture greedily, hot and excited in anticipation of the coming night's pleasure.

From the concert room came the noise of the band—loud, crashing drums; clanging, amplified guitars; a badly tuned piano. A singer was bawling asthmatically into a microphone. Aldwych could see his spotty face through the half open door of the snug, eyes closed, lips writhing in an agony of distortion; wriggling his hips and stamping his feet in ecstatic emotion: 'Huh Hi'm a cruhyin', suhigging, sluheeping, walking, lovin' boy.'

Aldwych saw a burly, grey-headed man, pushing his way between the tables, peering to right and left in the smoky room, as if he were looking for somebody. A man his age was an unusual sight amongst the teenagers who filled the George at weekends, when the rock 'n' roll group was play-

ing. He looked as if 'I'll take you home again Kathleen' and the other old ballads would be more his style. Perhaps he was some harassed father looking for his lad. His face looked familiar somehow. Suddenly Aldwych recognized him. Of course, he was on the force, he'd been put into plain clothes for the first time the night before. That's why he hadn't recognized him immediately, Aldwych told himself. He was used to seeing him in uniform. The elderly policeman's face lit up as he evidently spotted Aldwych through the open door of the snug. He thrust his way heavily through the crowded concert room and squeezed past a final table into the tiny snug.

'Sir.' He saluted and closed the door behind him but still had to raise his voice to make himself heard over the din from the concert room. 'I've been looking all over for you sir. Detective Sergeant Pully sent me to find you. He thinks that you ought to come over to Barlowmoor as soon as possible.'

'Why?' Aldwych asked. 'What's happened now?'

'Don't really know sir. Sergeant Pully didn't tell me anything much. But they're saying over Barlowmoor Estate way that there's a maniac loose. Any road there's a young lad missing. His mother's near having hysterics, station's full of reporters asking questions and t' chief's on his way over.'

'The chief!' Aldwych drained his pint. 'That's torn it, I better get over there right away. 'Have you got a car with you?'

'No sir.'

'Well then you go outside and find me a taxi, while I get things wound up here. I was on a very important case as a matter of fact,' he glanced at the woman, 'but I suppose that it will have to wait now.'

'Do you have to go love?' she said when the constable had left the room.

'Afraid I'll have to go if the chief's on the war-path. But I'll tell you what we'll do. You take this'—he gave her a

couple of crumpled pound notes that he'd found earlier in a motorist's driving licence when he pulled him up for driving through traffic lights at red—'Have yourself another drink or two, then buy a bottle and get along home. I'll put that bit of business in Manchester's way, phone the wife and tell her I'm doing extra duty, then I'll come to your house as soon as I can get away.'

'Well I hope that you're not going to be all night.'

'Don't worry, I won't be so long. It's only a matter of getting things sorted out.' He squeezed her hand. 'See you later.'

'Righto, I'll just be getting t' pot on t' boil for you, but hurry up, we don't want bottom burnt out.'

Aldwych winked and hurried out after the constable, who was standing outside by the waiting taxi.

'Where's Paully at now, still at Barlowmoor?'

'Yes sir, he said that he'd wait there for you.'

'Right, well you won't be needed there just yet. I've got a job for you to do. Phone up Manchester City police and tell them that we have received information that an illegal gambling den is being operated over a newsagent's shop at Fourteen Cassidy Street, Moss Side. Now have you got that all right?'

'Yes sir. Fourteen Cassidy Street, Moss Side.'

'That's it. Get it off straight away, and then you'd better follow me to Barlowmoor.'

'So that's how the C.I.D. get their information,' the constable said to himself after Aldwych had gone. Just like the pictures, blondes in bars and all. This plain clothes lark was all right, a sight better than pounding the streets all night getting beaten up by teddy boys.

'Now what's going on?' Aldwych asked Paully when he got to the station. Outside there was a long row of cars and the outer room was crammed with newspaper reporters, laughing and joking with one another.

'Well sir it's all a bit complicated,' Paully said. 'As far

as I can piece things together, it's like this. Do you remember me questioning that backward chap Dan Cartwright—the one who showed us where the van had been parked?'

'Yes.'

'Well him and a boy, Johnny Starter—it was his mother that reported it—went for a day's hike on the moors this morning, they do the same thing every Saturday apparently—go over the tops looking for birds' nests or something. Well the boy's mother went shopping and then spent the afternoon visiting friends. When she got home about five o'clock her son still wasn't home but there was nothing unusual in that. It wasn't until about half past six that she noticed anything unusual. Then she saw that somebody had been rifling the pantry and she found a note on the dresser saying that everybody was blaming Dan for the murder and they were going to go and live on the moors until his name was cleared.'

'Is everybody saying that this . . . 'er' Dan did it?'

'You know what rumour is, sir. It seems that somebody saw him going off with me in the police car yesterday, and that's what started it. Everybody soon began to imagine all sorts of things. One man said he's seen Dan Cartwright chasing after some boys with a gun and heard him shooting.'

'Shooting a gun?'

'We got that sorted out. What he had heard were fireworks and the gun was an empty air-pistol. Right little delinquent it was who owned it too. We'll be seeing a lot of him when he gets a bit older I'll bet.' Paully rubbed his chin. 'Meanwhile everyone on the estate is telling reporters that there's an armed maniac loose in the countryside with a young boy that he's kidnapped.'

'What time did you hear about it?'

'Nine o'clock. Unfortunately Mrs Starter didn't come straight to us, she went to the Cartwrights first and they told the local man as he was going round on his beat. Mr and Mrs Cartwright and Mrs Starter are waiting in the office, they're worried stiff.'

'I believe that the chief's on his way over.'

'That's right, I don't know how he heard about it, but I spoke to him on the phone about ten minutes ago and he sounded hopping mad.'

'He would be. I better have a word with the boy's mother and Mr and Mrs Cartwright. When the chief arrives show him in, and try to stall those reporters. Tell them that these two are just lost on the moors, that it's got nothing to do with the murder, tell them we expect an early arrest, anything to stop this maniac tale.'

'Right sir.'

Aldwych entered the inner office. The two women were sitting, anxious, on upright wooden chairs by the wall. Mr Cartwright was walking up and down, smoking. Behind the desk the local sergeant was fiddling with some papers, trying to look efficient.

'You can go,' Aldwych told the sergeant. He put on his most benign expression and turned to face the two women. 'Now then.'

'Have you found them, are they all right?' Mrs Starter and Mrs Cartwright chorused.

'Don't worry now, don't you go worrying,' Aldwych soothed. 'No harm will have come to them yet and once we have got all the facts we'll soon have them back home. Find them in no time. Now I'm going to send a policeman in with a notebook and I want you to tell him everything that you know; what time they set off, where they would be likely to go, what they were dressed like, and if you have any photographs of them I should like those too. Before you know it, we'll have the whole country alerted, everybody will be on the look-out for them. Then soon as it's light tomorrow morning we'll have search parties out all over the hills.'

'But that means they'll be out all night.'

'Yes it's unfortunate, but there's not much we can do in the dark, and one night in the open won't hurt them if they're well wrapped up.'

‘Well they’ve got blankets,’ Mrs Starter said.

‘There you are then—just as if they’d gone camping, so there’s no real cause for alarm is there? Now wait here and I’ll send a man in to get the facts.’

They felt comforted by the big policeman, he looked so stolid, dependable.

Aldwych walked back to the outer room. ‘Here you,’ he said to the elderly constable who had just arrived from Rutledge. ‘There are three people in there, go and take their statements would you?’

Paully approached Aldwych.

‘I told the press what you said sir. Can’t say they seemed very convinced. But it will keep them off our backs for a while.’

‘Fine. There’s not much we can do tonight except have descriptions broadcast over the radio, and their faces on the telly if we can get photographs. First thing tomorrow morning we better get search parties out. There isn’t much time, but see what you can do. Contact local hiking clubs and what have you, asking for volunteers to meet here at seven . . . No, better make it six-thirty and get onto the county police; we’ll be going into their territory so we’d better let them know. Then there’s the A.A. and R.A.C. Ask them to alert their patrolmen to keep an eye open on the highways.’

‘What about maps?’

‘Yes, get the largest scale you can, the Territorial Army might be able to help you there.’

‘Yes sir.’

‘O.K. you better get moving then, I’ll see you here at six-thirty sharp, cheerio then.’

‘Good night sir.’ Paully walked out to his car in the street. As he went down the steps to the pavement a large black Daimler came hurtling round the corner and braked angrily. Paully saw the chief, sitting in the driving-seat, he looked furious. Paully was glad to be getting away.

The chief was a lean, bristly, middle-aged man with a

baleful glare to his grey eyes. He had a meticulously trimmed moustache on his long upper lip. His hobbies were rough-shooting, fishing, fencing and chess. He was an ex-army officer. Aldwych was terrified of him. Aldwych still had the mentality of a schoolboy underneath all his bluster, and before the chief, he always felt like a child caught by his father writing dirty words. The chief's cold gaze inspired far more nervousness in the inspector than even his wife's beady eye did.

The chief swept into the station. The local sergeant mumbled something about helping with the statements and fled into the other office, leaving the chief and Aldwych alone.

'WELL!!' the chief threw himself into a chair and looked up at Aldwych. He despised Aldwych as inferior material. The chief was a man of taste and discrimination. Reared on Kipling and *The Four Feathers*, he had joined the army as a young man full of noble ideals. By the time he received his commission, his illusions were shattered, he had discovered that the men under him were thieving layabouts and his brother officers idle buck-passers. Aldwych, by his clumsy incompetence, made the army by contrast seem the well-disciplined team of comrades that the chief had imagined in his youth, and so, in some measure restored his old dream. The chief often compared the inspector, unfavourably, with the 'chaps' who used to serve under him. Their relationship was like that between a rather pompous headmaster of a Grammar School and a badly behaved adolescent prefect. The pair of them lived a hare-and-hounds sort of life; the one trying to get away with it, while the other tried to catch him at it, and Sergeant Paully who had more brains than the two of them put together was left to do most of the work in the department, which probably explained why it managed to run as smoothly as it did.

Dr Milson, who was probably the one person who fully understood the situation, took great delight in it, and his

parody of Aldwych and the chief holding a conference was a great success at parties.

'Well?' the chief said again. He took his pipe out of his top pocket and impatiently tapped it on the desk. Aldwych did his best to explain the situation.

'Some people might consider that a report,' the chief said when the long halting monologue was finished. 'I suppose the facts are concealed in there somewhere.'

Aldwych winced. 'Well sir I think you can see that everything possible is being done.'

'Oh quite and in the meantime we have an unsolved murder on our hands, a whole housing estate in a panic, and two people lost—or rather wandering on the moors. And those two a boy of eleven and a man of twenty-nine who is known to be mentally unstable. Everything possible is being done for the newspapers and that's a fact. By the way, might I ask just what you were doing to let all this happen?'

'Working on another case sir,' Aldwych said, inspired. 'From information that I received, I had reason to suspect that an illegal gambling party was being operated. On making further investigations I found out that this was so, and took steps.'

'Oh you did, did you?' the chief said coldly. 'With a murder stewing in the pot, you were too busy to attend to it because you were conscientiously breaking up a game of pitch and toss—or was it pontoon in some tap-room?'

'No sir, this wasn't anything small like that. This was a regular gang operating, roulette, bar, the lot—a proper Monte Carlo I was told it was.'

'Oh, and where was this "proper Monte Carlo"?''

'Manchester sir—Fourteen Cassidy Street, Moss Side, I informed Manchester City police at once.'

'Manchester! We have so little to do that you can afford to spend half the night chasing around doing Manchester's work. Maybe you don't think they'll be able to manage

without your help eh? They've been doing pretty well on their own so far.'

'Yes sir.' Aldwych's face turned puce.

'Now listen to me Aldwych. With the exception of your department, Rutledge has a fine police force, one of the best in the country. It's not often that you have anything much to do except sneak round strip clubs or try to nab a pick-pocket on the market, and this might all be a bit beyond you, but I want that boy back home tomorrow night. The murder can rest for a day or two—it might well be an outside job as you say, I'll grant you that much. This panic however must be stopped immediately. All this nonsense about a maniac wandering loose has got to be finished once and for all. Fortunately it's too late for it to get in the Sunday papers now so it won't be mentioned in the press until Monday morning—and it won't be mentioned then. Do I make myself clear?'

'Yes sir.'

'We must have them back by tomorrow evening. For the time being we'll stick to our story that they're just lost on the moors. When we have them tomorrow we'll be able to confirm it. Now how are you going to set about finding them?'

Aldwych outlined his plan.

'Hmm you're showing a bit of sense calling on these hikers, they must know the country as well as anybody.'

'That's what I thought sir, and now if you don't mind, I'd like to be getting along. Got a long night in front of me—maps to look up. Have to work out a plan if we're going to be able to start at half past six tomorrow.'

'Yes, I'll be getting home too.' The chief looked piercingly at Aldwych. 'I want to be fresh tomorrow myself, I'll be coming along with you.'

'Yes sir.' Aldwych showed him out, and then returned to the inner office. The elderly constable and the local sergeant had just finished taking the statements from Mrs Starter and Mr and Mrs Cartwright.

'Take those along to Central and have them typed,' Aldwych told the constable, 'and then see that descriptions are sent to the B.B.C., the R.A.C. and the Automobile Association.'

'Have you heard anything yet?' Mrs Cartwright asked, all three looked hopefully at Aldwych.

'Now there's no cause for worry. I'm sure that they'll be all right. Have either of them been camping before?'

'Johnny has,' Mrs Starter said, 'with the Scouts last summer.'

'Well then he knows what he's doing doesn't he?' Aldwych boomed genially. 'I don't think they'll come to much harm tonight, and we'll soon find them tomorrow. Meanwhile I really think that the best thing that you can do is go home, we're attending to everything that can be done, and I promise to let you know immediately anything turns up.'

Aldwych ushered them into the outer office, Mrs Cartwright leaning, sobbing on her husband's arm.

'See that these people get a car to take them home,' he said to the sergeant. 'I've got to be on my way now.'

He smiled reassuringly at them. 'Got a lot to get through tonight.'

'Thank you, Inspector. I'm sure you'll soon have them home for us,' Mr. Cartwright said, his arm round his wife.

'Yes well . . .' Aldwych hurriedly left. He summoned one of the patrol cars to take him into Rutledge. Near the town centre, he had the car stopped, climbed out and dismissed the driver.

He walked up the High Street for a hundred yards, then turned off across the open market. On the empty stalls he could see dim shadowy figures—courting couples. Aldwych hummed to himself, he'd thought that he was never going to get away—nearly twelve—he'd have to hurry. He quickened his pace as he reached the end of the market, and walked along the side streets, dodging between the gas lamps until he came to a dark block of terraced houses. The

window of one of them glowed with light, deep orange through the heavy curtains. Still up anyway! Aldwych hoped that there was some gin left, he felt that he needed a booster. He looked furtively up and down the street, then tapped on the window. The curtains opened a little while the woman gave him the once over. Satisfied, she walked to the door and let him in.

‘I thought that you were never going to get here,’ she said indignantly. She was smoking a cigarette and on the mantelpiece was a large lipstick-encrusted glass, half full of gin. Aldwych was relieved to see that there was still plenty left in the bottle.

‘We’ll soon make up for lost time love.’ He kissed her, rubbing his hand up and down over her large backside. While she was hanging his overcoat up he reached for the gin and took a long drink, straight from the bottle. The undiluted spirit made him cough slightly. He put the bottle back on the mantelpiece and sat down in the armchair.

‘Come on over here love.’

Detective Inspector Aldwych of the Rutledge Criminal Investigation Department patted his plump knee.

II

JOHNNY STARTER'S skin tingled in the cold morning air when he first pushed his head out of the cave. Pockets of mist still lingered, swirling, nestled in the hollows of the hills, and on the opposite side of the valley the bulky, grey mass of Deacon glowered. The rocks were damp and the morning chilly, but in the east the sky was blue, promising the sun whose rays were already illuminating the coronet of cloud over Deacon, silver, white and gold.

'Here Dan.' Johnny retreated into the cave and shook the humped form still wrapped snugly in the grey blankets. 'Come on wake up, it's going to be a fine day, the sun's coming out already.'

Dan sleepily shook his head and peered out.

'See how blue the sky is, it's going to be marvellous.'

Dan struggled out of the blankets and crawled from the cave, dragging his trousers along the ground behind him. Outside he stood up, his long, white, hairy legs cold between his thick socks and the flaps of his flannel shirt. He rubbed the duck meat out of his eyes.

'Look!' Johnny said. He pointed to the sun, pushing its way into view. The summit of Deacon Pike turned bright, less sombre, in the clear morning air, the last traces of mist dispersed and suddenly Johnny and Dan were no longer shivering but stood warm, their bodies lightened, in the sunlight.

Dan tugged on his trousers and pushed his feet into his heavy boots. They ran down to the stream, skipping down the mountain side, slithering down the scree. They washed noisily, splashing the cold water over their faces, not caring when it ran under their shirt collars, trickling in icy

progress down their backs and chests. Soon they were red and tingling and after filling the thermos flask they walked slowly back up the hill, drying in the morning sun.

'We'll have a brew,' Johnny said, 'and something to eat then we'll go and explore. We got to have a route planned in case they come looking for us round here.'

He lit the primus and before long they were drinking hot coffee, while eggs and bacon crackled in the frying-pan.

After they had eaten their breakfast, they went down the hill again to wash up the pan and plates, scrubbing the grease off with grass, then scouring them with sand from the stream bed. They returned to the cave and tidied the camp up, packing all the gear away ready to move: 'In case we have to get going in a hurry,' Johnny explained.

When everything was done, they set off to explore, starting along the ledge below the upper tier of rocks, scrambling in and out of the caves and gullies until they found a way to the top. They wandered along the scarp edge, following a sheep track. Dan sang the safari song:

*'Gin gan gulla, gulla, gulla, gulla watwah,
Gin gan goo, gin gan goo,
Aylah, aylah, shaylah,
Aylah, shaylah ru.'*

Aldwych paused and wiped his sweating brow. Breathing painfully he sat down on a rock and started fumbling with his left shoe, trying to make it appear as if he was removing a stone, as an excuse to drop out of the plodding column and rest for a few minutes.

The rest of the search party filed past him. Hikers mainly, they were happy, enjoying the toil up the steep hill to Robby's.

When Aldwych had arrived at the police station—half an hour late—the hikers had already been assembled outside. Chatting gaily, warm in thick sweaters and windproof gaberdine jackets in spite of the early chill; smoking their

pipes, impatient to be off. It was just another Sunday out for them.

Aldwych swore to himself. The chief, Sergeant Paully and a lean, leathery, middle-aged man had been poring over a map when he had arrived. As the inspector had entered the office they had all looked up.

'So here you are at last,' the chief said. He was wearing a tweed suit and sturdy shooting boots. 'Perhaps now you can tell us your plans for the search.'

Aldwych had been far too pleasantly occupied the night before to think about the search. He hadn't the faintest idea where to begin, he'd been hoping to have a few words with Paully before meeting the chief. Stepping up to the table, he began to study the unfamiliar map, the colours whirled and blurred in front of his bleary eyes. He couldn't make anything of it at all.

'Well?' the chief said.

Fortunately Sergeant Paully interrupted: 'We think that they must have gone over Robby's Monument.'

'That's obvious,' Aldwych said with relief—at least he knew where he was to start now. 'What we have to try and work out is where they would go from there.'

'Only one way that they could go,' the lean, leathery man pointed with a thick, nicotined finger at the map. He was wearing an enormous pair of elaborately nailed boots, a battered felt hat with a bit of ancient heather stuck in, torn oilskin leggings and a camouflaged, paratrooper's jacket. On the floor beside him was a bulging rucksack covered with badges and pennants—Y.H.A., Scottish Y.H.A., International Y.H.A., Austrian Tyrol, Eisteddfod 1920 and the Festival of Britain, all sewn carefully in place.

'This is Mr Taylor sir, President of the Rutledge Fell Walkers' Club,' Paully said.

Mr Taylor nodded to Aldwych: 'Like I was saying, there's only one way that they could go without coming back to a main road.' He wore badly fitted false teeth that clicked when he spoke, making him lisp slightly, spoiling

rather, the strong, silent man-of-the-great-outdoors effect of his clothing.

'We have the A.A. and R.A.C. on the look-out. If they were on a road they would certainly have been spotted.'

The false teeth clicked again. 'In that case, they could only have gone across the moor to Deacon Pike.' He traced the route on the map with his finger. 'See Robby's Monument is only a spur, pushing its way out from the main bulk of the Pennines. Now see how it is sort of wedge-shaped—like a triangle with what we call Robby's at the apex. They would have to keep on top until they reached Deacon. Once on the other side of there and past Gunnel Stones on the other side of Slackendale they could go anywhere, they're slap in the hills then. Could go south to the Peak, north-west towards the Forest of Bowland, north-east to the Yorkshire dales and north—they could get to Scotland if they wanted to, going north. Course they'll have to cross one or two roads whichever way they go but they needn't stay on them and they don't have to go near any villages or farms even.'

'Do you reckon that they will have reached—what do you call it, Gunnel Pike yet?' Aldwych asked.

'Gunnel Stones you mean, it's difficult to say, depends what time it was when they set off. It's rough going over to Deacon—peat bog best part of the way—no paths and it's claggy stuff to walk over if you're not used to it. Anybody who knew the country, oh . . . at most four hours. Anybody who didn't—always providing he didn't have a map or know how to use it—might wander round in circles wallowing up to his ears in peat all day and still never get there.'

'One of them is only a young boy remember,' the chief pointed out.

'Yes, but he's experienced isn't he, and let me tell you that some of these bits of lads can't half skip over the land when it comes to bog-trotting—leave some of us old ones standing they do.'

Eventually, following Taylor's advice, they split up into

two parties. Sergeant Paully leading one with Taylor as guide, and Aldwych leading the other. Paully's party were to go by car to a point on the Yorkshire highway and then 'flog it' as Taylor said, straight across country to Deacon Pike and Gunnel Stones, hoping to find Dan and Johnny there. If they didn't find them they were to wait for the second party who would go at a more leisurely pace over Robby's Monument, following the route that Johnny and Dan had taken the afternoon before. Meanwhile the chief was to go to Ribbondale, where Taylor assured him that he would easily get more volunteers amongst the climbers on the first train from Manchester. Then with the chief's party setting out from Ribbondale and the combined parties of Aldwych and Paully from Slackendale, they would cover the greater part of the intervening moor between them before eventually meeting at a point approximately half-way between the two valleys.

Aldwych's party was guided by an enthusiastic young man, who looked as if he could walk for ever without tiring. From where he was sitting on the rock, the inspector could see his bright red woollen ski cap, bobbing up the steep hill a hundred feet above. Aldwych groaned and pulled his shoe back on. He rejoined the column and toiled painfully on up the uneven path, beside the stream. The stones were painful through the thin soles of his town shoes, and the polished leather slipped on the peat. The sun had risen now and the heat seemed equatorial to the sweating Aldwych as he stumbled along, hampered by his thick heavy overcoat.

One by one, the rest of the party passed him by and wound out of sight round the corners of the twisting gully, until he was alone on the steep hill-side that seemed as if it would go on for ever.

One of the hikers up ahead was playing a harmonica, and the inspector could hear the faint lonely strains of 'Will ye no come back again' wafting over the heather. Down below a factory hooter sounded and Aldwych looked

at his watch. Eight o'clock—was that all? Had he only been half an hour on this wretched hill? But it must be right, that hooter could only be announcing the shift-change at the paper-mill, the only factory in the district to work on a Sunday. Four hours, that Taylor chap had said it would take them to get to wherever it was they were going. That meant another three and a half hours of this!

Aldwych's head was pounding, his throat was dry and inflamed. He stopped to get a drink from the stream, not bothering about the water being muddy, disturbed by the boots of the hikers who had tramped across it up ahead. He drank very deeply, lying flat on his belly like a great slug, greedily sucking up the cool water. Afterwards he felt a little better, refreshed by the water. Clambering to his feet, he tramped on until he came to the rough track that crossed the stream. He turned along it, grateful to be walking on the flat for a while.

Pausing for a moment, he leaned against the dry stone wall that flanked the track, and lit a cigarette. The nicotine revived him a little and when he resumed the walk, he moved faster. Almost happy, it was such a relief not to have to fight gravity at every step. But the track didn't remain flat for very long, and soon after it began to zig-zag up the hill. The cigarette dropped unnoticed from Aldwych's fingers. Aldwych plodded on, putting one foot automatically in front of the other. There wasn't even any water here, and the drink at the stream had only temporarily satisfied the demands of the alcohol in his bloodstream. He spat frequently, trying to get rid of the dry mucus that caked his throat. Breathing was painful, he felt dizzy, every muscle in his legs felt red hot, his feet were blistered, his ears were singing, spots danced before his eyes.

Then the path abruptly terminated in a small quarry, just below the peak of the hill, and Aldwych found himself staggering downhill towards the pool of black water. He stopped, shook his head, and looked round. The torture seemed to be over.

‘Over here Inspector.’ One of the hikers was sitting on top of the quarry wall. He was wearing shorts and his long, bare legs dangled over the edge.

Aldwych wiped the sweat off his brow and out of his eyes. Just above he could hear the sound of happy laughter and young voices singing, accompanied by the harmonica player. He picked his way round the edge of the pool to the shallow corner where the hiker was sitting.

‘Put your hands on the top and spring up.’

Spring up! —Aldwych dragged himself clumsily over the rim on all fours. He knocked one of his knees against a sharp corner of rock, and felt the blood run, hot and sticky down his leg. Sweat pouring off him, he limped towards the folly, round which the hikers were sitting. They cheered loudly, and without malice when the inspector appeared; they had all been beginners once, and knew what it felt like.

The leader offered Aldwych a cup of tea from a thermos, and the inspector gratefully drank the hot sweet liquid as he leaned against the wall of the crumbling stone folly.

‘Like to have a rest for a while.’

Aldwych handed the cup back.

‘Just until I get my breath back,’ he panted.

‘You look tired.’

‘Didn’t get much sleep last night. On the job you know. I’ll be all right in a moment or two. Which way do we go from here?’

‘Straight across the moor there, towards that hill you can see in the distance, that’s Deacon Pike.’ He pointed over the plateau towards a conical mound, blue on the horizon.

‘Do we have to climb over it?’ Aldwych asked.

‘No we’ll go round the far side, there’s a valley that we can descend into Slackendale at the foot of Gunnel Stones.’

No more climbing! Aldwych looked gratefully at the flat moor stretching before them like a great heathery bed.

‘Well, let’s be getting on our way then.’

‘Sure you’re ready?’ the leader asked doubtfully.

‘Certainly,’ Aldwych said. ‘Got my second wind now,

feel fine. It was just the climb up the hill there and lack of sleep, you know how it is.'

'Right.' The leader shouldered his rucksack. 'Come on lads, on your feet.'

The hikers stood up. The harmonica player blew a last chord, tapped the spittle out of his instrument and tucked it into one of his anorak pockets.

'Spread out and keep your eyes open,' the leader in the red cap said, 'just in case they're in one of the gullies.'

The band set off in a straggling line across the moor, watching the peaty ground for any sign of Dan and Johnny's passing. Aldwych realized to his horror that the apparent flatness was a deception, and it wasn't long before he was in difficulties again. The ground was dissected by innumerable gullies, and the peat was difficult to walk on—where it was dry he turned his ankles in the powdery stuff, where it was wet, it clung and tugged at his shoes, threatening to drag them off his feet and tormenting his blistered heels. Aldwych staggered unhappily over the dunes, slipping and sliding backwards as he climbed up them; then slithering down into the gullies, splashing uncaring through the streams in the bottom, sinking to his ankles in the bog.

Detective Sergeant Paully whistled cheerfully to himself as he strode steadily through the thick bracken beside the taciturn Mr Taylor. Full of energy in spite of having stayed up for the greater part of the night before studying maps of the district, he was enjoying the physical exercise; and—always impressionable—he had soon caught the infectious enthusiasm of the hikers, happy to be out walking in the warm spring sun, after a week cooped up in a factory or office.

'How much longer do you think it will take us to get to Gunnel Stones?' he asked Taylor.

'Oh, not more than half an hour or so at this rate,' he said. 'We'll be dropping down into Slackendale soon, then it's all easy going along the valley bottom, right to the foot of

the rocks. See we won't go right over the top of Deacon Pike, we'll just skirt its flank as you might say; the others will be coming round the back of it and they'd soon spot anyone on top. What I reckon that we ought to do is send a man up to the top of Gunnel Stones to keep a look-out—you can see for miles, right across the moors from there—and then the rest of us can search the valley; there's plenty of hiding places among them boulders in the bottom.'

They walked on over the wide moor. One of the hikers started to sing. It was a hiker's and climber's song, a rebellious protest against the authority of the man who had the temerity to try and keep the moors to himself, merely because he happened to own them, or perhaps had a permit to shoot grouse there.

The singer's voice wasn't particularly tuneful, but it was deep, rich and loud and he wasn't afraid to use it. He bellowed the words heartily:

'Oh the day was just ending as I was descending,
By Grindsbrook and high Upper Tor,
When a voice said: "Hey you." In the way keepers
do.

He'd the worst face that I ever saw.
He said all that land was his master's,
I stood there just shaking my head,
No man has a right to the mountains,
No more than the deep ocean bed.

'Oh he called me a louse and said think of the grouse,
So I thought but I still couldn't see,
Why on old Kinder Scout and the moors thereabout,
There weren't room for both t' grouse and me.'

The whole party—even Taylor—joined lustily in the chorus. Paully didn't know the words, but he had quickly picked up the simple tune and he hummed it as the others sang:

‘For I’m chained to the work bench on Mondays,
But I am a free man on Sundays,
And rather than part from the mountains I love,
I think I would rather be dead.’

The singer started the second verse as the party began the descent into Slackendale.

Johnny and Dan, sitting on a pinnacle of rock at the top of Gunnel Stones, heard the words of the second verse, carried up the valley by the wind:

‘I once wooed a maid, a spot welder by trade,
With a face like the bright summer moon,
And the blue of her eyes matched the blue of the skies,
And I wooed her from April to June.
But the day that we should have got married,
I went for a ramble inste-a-d,
For rather than part from the mountains I love,
I think I would rather be dead.’

‘There’s somebody coming,’ Johnny said. ‘They might be after us, come on.’

They scrambled off the pinnacle and down the crags to the cave to get their gear.

By the time that Paully and his party reached the valley bottom, Johnny and Dan were already well over the moor, travelling southwards towards the Peak District.

Taylor put his rucksack down beside the stream. ‘Well here we are. That’s Deacon on the left, and over there, between those two gullies—Gunnel Stones.’

‘Is it possible to get up them?’ Paully looked doubtfully at the forbidding outcrop of rocks.

‘Not up the face, that’s strictly for experienced climbers with the proper tackle, but see the two gullies on each side?’

Paully nodded his head.

'Well we can get up one of them all right. Means a bit of a scramble, and it's none too dry with the streams running down the bottom, but it's safe enough. On top of course it's flat moorland just the same as what we've just come over.'

'Yes I saw that on the map. The whole area is a big dissected plateau, with outcrops such as these lining the sides of the steeper valleys.'

'That's right. Any road, there's no point in all of us going up there yet. The other party won't be here for an hour or more. I reckon that like I said before, we ought to send a couple of lads up to keep a look-out, and the rest of us can beat up the valley, searching amongst all these boulders.'

'Right you are, you know this country best. What do you reckon are our chances of finding them?'

'If they haven't already got past here, then we can't miss them; they'll have to come down this valley to get away from the others. That is if they're to keep off the main roads. Course if they've already been here then it's another matter altogether. We'll have to split up into small groups and try to cover the whole moor. That will be a whole day of a job, but as you can see,' Taylor unfolded the map, 'if they have a good enough start, even then we might not cop 'em.'

'What about the chief at Ribbondale? Don't forget that he will be sending out parties as soon as he gets them organized.' Paully pointed on the map, 'They should be setting out by now, coming over this way. So surely, we'll have them trapped between us?'

'Aye we should, but don't bank on it all t' same.' Taylor shook his head. 'Once there were somebody lost on these moors and it were three days before we found 'em—and they weren't trying to avoid us. The big advantage that we have is that they're probably a bit stiff and tired after a night in the open, and we're as fresh as daisies. We can

just move that little bit faster, and when the others arrive we should be able to get along at a fair belt. Meantime, we'll just have to do what we can here.'

Taylor selected two of the younger men to climb up to Gunnel Stones.

The two men walked up the scree slope to the foot of the crag. They didn't know of the existence of the chimney which provided an easy route up the first tier, so they traversed the hill-side below the outcrop and scrambled up the gully to the left. They walked back along the edge to the top of the crag proper. They had arranged signals with Taylor: if there was nobody in sight they were to wave; if on the other hand they spotted Dan or Johnny, then they were to drop a handkerchief over the edge of the cliff. They gazed across the barren moorland. There was nobody in sight. They waved and sat down on the rock, their feet dangling in space, watching the minute figures below as they spread out and began searching the tumbled boulders that littered the valley floor, scrambling over them, searching in every crevice.

One of the young men took a crumpled packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and they lit up.

The two young men were clerks—they worked together at a mill office in Rutlidge. They were very ordinary. Extraordinary in their ordinariness, so that people noticed them for it. Plain looking, unambitious, their thoughts were as dull and featureless as their pudding-basin faces. They were always together. At the office where they spent their working hours; in the evenings when they would go to the community centre to play billiards, or visit each other's houses to pore over maps and guide-books, planning their weekend walks; during their annual holiday which they would spend hostelling in the Lake District, North Wales or the Scottish Highlands.

Outside walking and each other they had no interests, they never drank, they never danced, they never took girls on the empty stalls of Rutlidge market at night. They

seemed sexless. Other young men at the office used to laugh about it, used to rib them and say that their testicles still hadn't dropped, but they never took any notice.

'It's a proper funny how-d'you-do all this in' it?' one of them said slowly.

'Why?'

'Well, I don't really know, but I mean to say, if they were just lost like the policeman said, then we wouldn't need to chase after them would we? I mean they'd be glad to see us wouldn't they, and that policeman was talking to old Taylor as if they were hiding, trying to avoid us. I mean whoever heard of anybody lost on the moors who didn't want to be rescued?'

'I bet owd Taylor knows summat, way that 'tec were talking to 'im. Could see he were letting him in on summat.'

'Yes. Here do you think that it could have anything to do with that girl who was murdered?'

'How do you make that out?'

'Well, they're from the same place aren't they? And this man is supposed to be backward. Maybe if he knew that the police were after him he ran away and took the boy as a hostage sort of.'

'Do you think so then?'

'I don't know but it's a very funny search somehow isn't it? I mean like, it just doesn't seem right somehow.'

They sat on the edge of the outcrop, watching the busy, ant-like figures down below.

On the moors behind Deacon Pike Aldwych was reduced to a shambling, unco-ordinated wreck. The whole machinery of his body had broken down and refused to function properly, under the stress of walking over the rough uneven moorland. Several times he had fallen in the morass and he was black with peat. There was peat in his shoes, his socks, his hair, his mouth, his ears, his eyes, his nose, there was peat under his shirt. Somewhere he had lost his hat and more than once, one of his shoes had been sucked clean

off by the bog. The last time, Aldwych hadn't even noticed and one of the hikers had to retrieve it for him. When the inspector put it back on, he hadn't been aware of the condition of his foot—the skin blistered and broken until it bled, the remnants of his tattered sock stuck to the raw flesh. Aldwych stumbled on automatically, no longer feeling the aching torment in the muscles of his calves and thighs, the terrible agony in his chest. All sense of purpose and direction was lost and he often wandered right off the route, having to be led blindly back in the right direction by one of the hikers.

Johnny and Dan ate some bread and jam for lunch. They ate while they walked, only pausing to take bread from the sliced loaf and spread the sweet, red, sticky jam across it when they wanted some more. They didn't bother about butter.

They had made good time during the morning, keeping up a steady pace since leaving Gunnel Stones, and they were now a good eight miles ahead of their pursuers. The fact that they were being chased only added spice to their joyful tramp over the sunburnt moor. Turned the walk into an exciting adventure.

Not long after they had finished eating, they came to Ratcher Rocks and took the path that led down into Ribbondale, past Twin Rocks and underneath shelving Bastow Butress. It was a narrow, winding path, that tumbled down the hill-side through the heather and the old year's bracken; the stones worn white by bootnails. A rough, true mountain path. Every inch of the way seemed to have its own, particular, individual characteristics to feet that had travelled it many times, feet which were intimate with every pebble, and knew every turn of its wandering course. The path fell steeply at first, down a slippery mud slope, below Ratcher Rocks, then it doubled back past the bivalve tree before crossing Dead Man's gully—a narrow valley where the body of a man had been found

thirty years before; a gamekeeper mysteriously killed by a discharge from his own shotgun—accident, murder, suicide—no one had ever been able to discover. Uphill for a while and over a small, marshy plateau to Twin Rocks—two boulders each as big as a small house, standing one on either side of the path like sentinels. Down again, rocky now and beneath Bastow Butress, green, slimy and evil looking. Facing north, never getting any sun so that even on the driest days it dripped with water.

As the valley deepened and broadened, the path crossed many bubbling, tumbling streams that poured down the hill-side to join Ratcher Brook in the bottom. Sometimes the path would follow the course of one of these streams for a little way, before resuming its own independent route down to Ribbondale.

Johnny and Dan were just crossing one of these streams, walking along a narrow, springy plank—all that remained of an old bridge—when they heard the heavy tramp of many bootnails, lower down the hill. It sounded as if a large party was approaching.

‘Quick get under cover,’ Johnny said.

They jumped off the plank bridge and darted up the stream a little way, hiding, crouched behind a thick holly bush that clung to the steep side of the narrow, tributary valley.

A couple of dozen men came into view, trudging up the path in single file, not speaking to each other. Most of them were climbers, asked by the chief to join the search party, as they arrived at Ribbondale station on the train from Manchester, intending to spend the day on Ratchers or Bastow Butress, both popular crags amongst local mountaineers. They carried ropes, karabiners, pitons and other gear which they would have needed for their day’s sport and they moved with a practised, loping gait, their feet seeming to find their own way along, independent of the eye, finding a sure foothold on the uneven ground at every stride.

With them was the chief himself, slightly breathless and a bit red in the face, but bearing up pretty well, and trailing along a few yards behind were two county policemen and a local farmer.

'They must be out looking for us,' Johnny whispered. 'There are policemen with them. We can't go that way now, there might be more of them further down the path.'

As soon as he thought that the search party was far enough away, Johnny led Dan up the stream, back towards the top of the hill.

'We'll go over by Burnplatt's Leap,' he explained. 'Then soon as it's dark we'll try to get across Ribbondale.'

'Well they don't seem to be in the valley anywhere,' Sergeant Paully said. He sat down on a rock beside the stream.

'No, didn't really think that they would be here.' Taylor sat down beside the sergeant and gave him a cigarette. 'What I can't understand is where the other party has got to. They should have been here long ago.'

'You don't think that they could have got lost?' Paully struck a match, shielding the delicate flame with the box. He lit his own cigarette first, took two or three puffs, to get it going properly, then handed it to Taylor. Taylor lit up from the glowing tip then gave the cigarette back to Paully.

'Lost,' he said. 'No not young Harry Thompson, he knows the way all right, he could find his way around these hills blindfolded. No it must be something else that's delaying them.'

'Here, you know the way that you lit the fags, I'd say that you were used to this sort of thing, you know, being out on the hills, in the wind and that. Have you done much walking before?'

'No, it just seemed the obvious way to do it,' Paully was flattered by Taylor's obvious approval. 'Do you know I

never realized that there was countryside like this round Barlow Bridge. I spent my holidays in the West Country once and it's no better than these moors.'

'Aye it's surprising how many people—even local people don't know about them—miss the beauty on their own doorstep so to speak. Course the Peak District is very popular, but this little pocket here is practically undiscovered by the tourists. Say, maybe when this lot is over, you'd like to come out rambling with the club some time?'

'I certainly would. Thank you very much for the invitation.'

'Think nowt about it. Why not join? I can give you an application form. All you have to do is fill it in and we can make you a member right away. Apart from the walking we have one or two social events of an evening. Hot-pot suppers, dances, whist drives, that sort of thing. Bonfire on November the Fifth. Christmas party you know.'

'Yes I'd like to join,' Paully said. He wasn't a local man and didn't know many people in Rutledge, had no really close friends and had often felt lonely in the evenings.

'Fine I'll get a form off Harry as soon as he gets here. He's the secretary and always carries one or two in his rucksack to give to anybody who's interested and who he happens to meet while he's out. The subscriptions are two-pence a week.'

They sat smoking for a while in silence.

'Still no sign of Harry and your inspector,' Taylor said eventually.

'You don't suppose it could mean that they've found them?' Paully asked. 'Turned back the way they've come?'

'Harry would have sent somebody back with a message if that had happened, letting us know. I can't for the life of me think what's holding them up.'

The hikers stood grouped round the wet, prostrate moan-

ing figure of Detective Inspector Alfred Aldwych, lying by the side of the stream in the valley that led from behind Deacon Pike down into Slackendale.

While the inspector had been descending one of the many waterfalls the leather soles of his shoes had slipped on the wet gritstone, and he had lost his footing. He had held on for a brief moment with numbed hands then plunged twenty feet down the steep rock, hit a narrow ledge and bounced into the deep pool below the waterfall.

The hikers had soon got him out of the water, and Harry Thompson, the leader, had made a quick examination of his groaning body.

When he had finished he straightened up, took off his red ski cap and scratched his thick curly hair.

'The ankle's gone I think. Broken. Nothing else much the matter apart from one or two bruises and cuts, but he certainly won't be able to walk on that ankle.'

Aldwych writhed, moaned again and cursed.

'What are we going to do now,' somebody asked. 'He looks in a bad way.'

'Yes, he's probably suffering from shock. Somebody get a stove going and brew him some hot tea—very sweet, and get those wet clothes off him. Any of you with spare clothing, get it out and cover him with it. Have to keep him warm as possible. We can't shift him without a stretcher. As I know the country best, I'll go direct to the phone box on the Lancashire-Yorkshire road and call for an ambulance and expert help. A couple of you had better let Mr Taylor and the others know—they'll be at Gunnel Stones. Jake, Grey, will you do that? You've done a bit of rock climbing and you'll be able to make better time down the waterfalls.'

'Right you are Harry.' Jake and Grey shouldered their rucksacks and set off down the stream, disappearing over the rim of the next waterfall below, as they started to descend it.

Harry Thompson made sure that Aldwych was as comfortable as it was possible to make him, then prepared to return across the moor to summon a stretcher party and an ambulance.

‘I’ll be some time,’ he said, ‘because I’ll wait by the telephone box on the road to guide them back.’

'WELL THIS has turned out to be a first-class muck-up, sergeant.'

The chief and Paully were walking slowly beside the stream that ran from Gunnel Stones down Slackendale. The men who had made up the search parties were spread out before and behind them. No longer needing to hurry, they ambled along in groups of three and four, chatting and smoking. The harmonica player was improvising softly.

The sun was out of sight behind Deacon Pike and already it was beginning to go dark in the deep valley, although the peaks of the hills round about were still gilded by the last rays of the rapidly sinking sun.

'I'm very sorry sir,' Paully said.

'Not your fault lad. An accident—unfortunate but unavoidable—can't be helped.' The chief's voice was calm and precise although inwardly he fumed.

It was Aldwych's fault of course, although the chief wouldn't say so in front of Paully. Not the thing to discuss an officer's affairs with someone of lower rank. Nothing worse for discipline.

He wished though, that Sergeant Paully had been in charge of the search instead of the inspector. Sort of young man that you could trust, the sergeant was. You wouldn't find him falling into any pond when there was his duty to be done. The chief snorted. The whole plan of campaign had been ruined by Aldwych's clumsiness. Paully's party had been delayed at Gunnel Stones and then had to turn back to help to get the stretcher up the waterfalls. The chief hoped that they'd given Aldwych a jolt or two—pity they didn't drop him in again and leave him! By the time that they'd

been ready to resume the search, the chief's party of mountaineers had covered most of the area and it was clear that Johnny and Dan had somehow slipped past them. If it hadn't been for the inspector's accident, the combined parties would certainly have caught them. They would have had them trapped between them. The chief didn't know that in fact, warned of the approach of Paully's party by the hikers' song, Johnny and Dan had moved much faster than anyone had anticipated, and had actually been passed by the chief and his men as they toiled up the valley from Ribbondale. Already the two fugitives were sitting at the top of Burnplatt's Leap, ready to descend and slip across the road in Ribbondale as soon as it got dark.

'What now sir?' Paully asked.

'Too late to do anything tonight. Have to wait until morning now. You'll be in charge tomorrow, sergeant. Have to handle the whole business on a much bigger scale too. Get the Mountain Rescue out, and have a plea for volunteers broadcast on the radio. Today has taught us that the parties need to be in constant communication, so ask the army if they can lend us a few trained men with walkie-talkies. We must find them as soon as possible. The longer that they are out there, the greater the area of ground we have to cover. We can't play about much longer. Don't forget that we still have the murder to solve.'

'We might have a lead on that now, sir. London may have come up with something.'

'If the man we want was from there perhaps they have, but we can't bank on it.'

'I'll check as soon as I get back sir.' Paully was certain that nothing helpful would have come through from London. He thought about the report locked in his desk, the results of his own investigations. Tonight perhaps he would get an opportunity to air his theories.

'Yes, let's see . . .' the chief looked at his watch, '. . . it's six o'clock now. Reckon another half hour to get back to the cars; we should be in Rutlidge for about quarter to

seven. I'll go home and change . . . Could you drop into my office about eight-thirty?'

Johnny and Dan watched the sun setting from Burnplatt's Leap. They were squatting on the lower edge of the narrow cleft—a deep gorge between two jutting crags, at one point only fifteen feet or so apart where the legendary Burnplatt, a gypsy poacher, had jumped across to escape from gamekeepers and certain transportation at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

'We better be getting down,' Johnny said. 'By the time that we get to the bottom it'll be dark enough.'

They scrambled off the rock and hurried down the hillside. In the valley, they huddled in the shelter of the wall by the road, waiting for an opportunity to cross. The road ran from Manchester into the West Riding of Yorkshire and was extremely busy. The lights of lorries carrying vegetables from Lincolnshire to the Manchester market and of cars returning from Sunday excursions over the tops scythed the darkness, sweeping over the hill-sides at the sharp bends.

On the further side of the road were woods, planted on the banks above the reservoirs to prevent erosion.

'We'll be all right over there,' Johnny said.

At the first break in the traffic, they climbed over the wall and ran across the road to the cover of the trees. Just in time, they reached the shelter of the plantation, throwing themselves over the low wall as another car came along the road, lighting up the tarmac with its headlights.

'Just made it,' Johnny panted.

They rested for a moment, then walked down through the scented pines. Through the tracery of branches, silver in the moonlight, they could see the placid surface of the reservoir, smooth and glassy, seeming solid. Down through the woods and by the wide expanse of water they found a little hut, built to hold workmen's tools, and they cleared

out a sleeping place on the dry wooden floor. They cooked their supper outside under the trees.

After they had eaten, the wind came up, rippling the surface of the still water, and they lay in their blankets, hearing the lonely motion of the cold pines. Across the valley, a diesel-electric train clattered along the tracks, a noisy, glittering snake of light. The wind carried the sound of singing, very faint, from the Green Man a mile away along the road; and on the railway a signal arm fell with a clatter and a dull thud, like an executioner's axe, turning a light from green to red.

Two ambulance men wheeled Aldwych into the casualty department of Rutledge Royal Infirmary. Dr Milson was on duty. He was alone in the room, playing miniature billiards with some large pink pills and a pencil on top of a surgical trolley.

'Well, well,' he said. 'Has Alfie done himself an injury?—dear, dear, then we'll have to make him well again.'

He cannoned a final pill, then scooped them up and replaced them in a dark brown bottle.

'Now then,' he said. 'What seems to be the trouble?'

'The ankle's broken Doctor,' one of the ambulance men said, 'and multiple cuts and bruises.'

Harry Morgan sat alone in the bar parlour of the Stag. From the tap-room he could hear the drunken voices, still loudly discussing the murder of Jenny Greenhouse and Dan Cartwright's subsequent disappearance.

Harry stared into the amber comfort of his glass. Why? God, why did she have to come back to torment him? If she had only stayed away. He'd almost forgotten her. Jesus Christ, if she had only stayed away.

How had it happened? He hadn't meant even to hurt her, let alone kill her. He had loved her. Loved her! But she'd laughed at him, laughed! Listened to him, let him talk, let him make a fool of himself—then laughed! A

hateful, mocking laugh and told him that she hated, detested, despised him. That his clumsy lust, his coarse voice and manners, the smell of his sweaty body, and stale, beery breath all disgusted her.

That afternoon, only three days ago, they had lain there by the log together. Then she had adjusted her under-clothing and sat up. He remembered her beautiful, methodical movements as she had pulled the flimsy garments back over her lovely legs and hips. And they had sat smoking while he told her how he would not have minded the child. How she should not have gone away, that he was not like some, he wouldn't have let her down, he would have stuck by her; he loved her.

She had listened patiently, a peculiar half smile on her face. All the while drawing on her cigarette. Then when he'd finished, after she'd let him make a fool of himself, she had laughed and told him that the child was not his, that it was only two years old. After that she had really let fly at him. The words were lost now, everything had been blurred, too fast for his mind to follow. All that he could remember were her lips, cruel, distorted, twisting round each vicious syllable, and his hands, those big clumsy hands, trying only to silence her at first, to stop the venomous flow of sound; then tightening as the words continued, loud and hysterical. Even after her breath had been choked off, the lips still writhed in her swollen, purpled face, mouthing the soundless, virulent vituperations.

Suddenly he had realized that she was dead.

He had been quite calm at first. The physical action had left him cool, poised. He had walked casually back to his van, parked on the lane. Nobody had seen them, nobody had ever seen them together. Even the night before when he'd driven her home, she had insisted on meeting him outside the pub, because, she said, she didn't want any gossip starting. And he had dropped her off at the corner so that her mother wouldn't be disturbed by the sound of his engine, or the slamming of the van door.

Only later, when he was home again, haunted by her beauty, the beauty that he had destroyed, only then had he realized what he had done, and the nightmare had started.

Why, why, why? Why did it have to happen? What had he done to deserve it? He beat the table with his clenched fist.

'Can I get you something Harry?' Bert Tatlers pulled aside the curtain across the doorway to the bar. Harry realized that he must have taken the hammering on the table for a signal. He quickly composed himself as best he could.

'Oh yes, a pint of bitter please, Bert.' Harry drained his pot and handed it to the landlord. Christ, he mustn't behave like this. Somebody would be sure to notice. He mustn't behave in any way that was unusual—he'd made his mind up about that. That was what the police would be on the look-out for. He must pull himself together, carry on as if everything were normal. He had thought that Bert had looked at him a bit strangely just now. When the landlord came back with the pint Harry tried to look cheerful. 'Have one yourself Bert?'

'No thanks Harry, not just at present. I've got one in the bar. I'm all right for the time being.' He took Harry's money. When he came back with the change Harry asked him for a second time, becoming insistent.

'Go on Bert,' he grabbed hold of the landlord's arm, 'have one with me.'

'But I've told you Harry, I'm all right. I've got them lined up on the bar there.'

'Have a drop of something short then. I'm as good as anybody else to have a drink with aren't I? There's nothing wrong with my money is there?' Harry was shouting now, belligerent.

'Certainly not Harry, you're just as good as anybody else.' At the finish Bert Tatlers had to have a drink to placate him.

What was the matter with Harry tonight, he thought

later. He didn't usually behave like that. Course he'd been drinking a lot lately, that might explain it. Come to think of it, he'd been hitting the ale pot pretty steady ever since the murder.

Funny how a murder upset people, Bert thought. Everybody was on edge about it—that and Dan Cartwright kidnapping the boy and all. Course there was no doubt that he'd done it now, although the police still weren't saying very much. Just a message on the radio and pictures on the telly, asking people on the roads to watch out for them and report, if they saw them, to the nearest police station. You couldn't blame the police for being pretty cagey about it all though. When all was said and done, they must feel pretty foolish, having had a hold of him once and then letting him get away like that. No wonder they were trying to keep it hushed up.

And Dan Cartwright. You'd never have thought that Dan Cartwright would do a thing like that, he always seemed so gentle. Course like that chap had said the other night, that sort always did seem gentle until they did summat. But to think, only last Wednesday lunchtime, he'd been in the pub here feeding the fishes. Bert Tatlers shuddered, supposing he'd gone off his rocker then, when there were only the two of them in the place. A pity about young Jenny. A nice little handful like that, good-hearted too in spite of what some of them old gasbags had to say. And she had some spirit. She'd certainly told Jack Scott where to get off that night—he hadn't been near the Stag since. Funny when you put your mind to it—she'd been defending Dan Cartwright and only the next afternoon he did her in. You could understand the folk on the estate being cut up about it. After all, like they said, it could have been anybody that he picked on to kill. Still might be. The police said he was on the moors, but how did they know? There were plenty of places round about where he could be hiding. Why he might have done that boy in and sneaked back home. It wouldn't be beyond his parents to

keep him hidden away—they must be a bit queer in the head themselves and all, to have him living with them all those years, when anybody with enough sense to count coppers could see that he'd be better off in an institution.

Yes, it was easy to see why people on the estate were put out of flunter, right enough. But Harry Morgan, that was another thing. A fine, big young fellow like him, going all to pieces like that. But then there's naught as funny as folk. You can never tell with people. Often the big ones were the softest underneath. Fancy Harry Morgan being so sensitive though. Ah well, one thing, it was all good for trade, he could hardly serve fast enough. Bert Tatlers picked up his tray and went into the concert room in answer to the demanding bell.

Detective Inspector Alfred Aldwych of the Rutledge C.I.D. sat on a hard, uncomfortable wooden chair in the huge, draughty, Victorian entrance hall of Rutledge Royal Infirmary. Most of his acquaintances would not have recognized him in the odd assortment of garments of different sizes, contributed by various hikers.

His foot was stretched out in front of him, immobile in plaster of paris. The ankle still throbbed painfully, and there didn't seem to be a single part of his tender, aching body that wasn't either bruised or lacerated.

'No need to keep you in,' Dr Milson had said cheerfully, putting a stitch in here, a dab of antiseptic on there. It would have to be Milson of all people. 'My my,' he had said, when he made Aldwych take his trousers down to have an anti-tetanus injection—the skin of Aldwych's buttocks and thighs was chafed and red with walking, 'does his little bot-bot smart then? Never mind we'll send for a great big ambulance and have him home to mumsy in a jiffy and she can powder it for him.'

In a jiffy! That was hours ago and still no ambulance. Meanwhile he had to sit here freezing to death, with all the nurses click-clacking up and down the corridors in their

high heels, looking at him as if he were some drunk just brought in after a brawl. He hadn't even got a smoke. His own cigarettes had been ruined when he fell in the water, and an officious night sister had confiscated one that he managed to scrounge off the porter, as soon as he'd got it lit. 'Cawn't have you setting the hospital on fire can we?' she'd said, stubbing it out and throwing it in a litter bin. Stuck up bitch! If he got her pants off her he'd soon teach her a lesson she wouldn't forget. Take her down a peg.

Where could that bloody ambulance be? How long were they going to keep him here, with nothing to eat, nothing to drink? What wouldn't he give for a drink, Aldwych thought with longing of the bottle of whisky he kept at home for emergencies like this. Hm, pity his wife would be waiting there with it.

How long had he been sitting in this tomb of a place? Aldwych glared up at the statue of Prince Albert, standing on a marble pedestal by the door. What time was it anyway?

He looked at his watch. Stopped! Full of water—he could see it condensing on the inside of the glass. There was a clock over the door. From where he was sitting, Aldwych couldn't quite see it for the statue of Prince Albert. If he could just lean sideways a little. He kept the weight on his good leg and tilted the chair to the left, just a little bit more. The chair tilted further over at an acute angle. Another inch or two and . . . Suddenly the chair legs slipped on the highly polished floor. Aldwych cried out and thrust with his arm to break his fall. He hit the floor awkwardly, his full weight on the arm, twisting it under him. He felt a sharp needle of pain in his wrist, run up his arm in quick, agonizing stitches. Heard the clip-clop of hurrying feet down the corridor. Dimly saw the vague shape of a female figure bending over him. Then someone started trying to tear his arm off at the shoulder.

Somewhere a voice said: 'It's broken, better take him back to casuakies and send for Dr Milson.'

They started trying to pull his arm off again, and Aldwych fainted.

Paully went in to report to the chief. The chief was sitting behind his big desk. The day's exercise had tired him a little, but he wasn't going to let the younger man see it. Sergeant Paully looked as fresh as when he had set out, but then he was hardly thirty. At least the chief thought, he'd shown them all that an old campaigner could still take it, not like Aldwych. A comparatively young man still, the inspector, and the pace too much for him already.

There was a large-scale street plan of Rutledge on the cream-painted wall behind the desk, with different-coloured pins to mark accident black spots and on the desk-top was a leather riding crop, with an ivory handle—the chief used it as a pointer. There was a carved ivory paper knife as well and a miniature, enamelled, Benares brass temple bell made in Birmingham. In the corner was an elephant foot wastepaper basket, and on the mantelpiece over the gas fire that was never lit were cups that the chief had won in the army. They weren't very big cups and the chief hadn't won them by his own, unaided efforts. He had been in the Catering Corps and his unit had won them for cake-decorating, but the chief liked to think that people didn't know that.

The chief's lean face was yellowish in the glare of the unshaded electric light bulb. The skin was stretched over his bony forehead as tight as that of the shrunken head he used as a paper-weight.

'Well?' the chief asked.

'London have traced Jenny Greenhouse sir, and the father of her child.'

'Already! Good. Is there anything to suggest that the crime was committed by anybody from down there?'

'Afraid not sir. In spite of the gossip, it seems that Jenny Greenhouse wasn't such a bad girl. In fact quite respectable really. Had this carry-on with a chap who wouldn't—or

rather couldn't marry her. Got left with the kid of course, but apart from that, there was no other funny business. She had quite a good job down there, with an advertising agency. They thought so much of her that they kept her on—at full salary—while she was having the child, and for a month or two afterwards until she managed to fix up with someone to look after it while she was at the office.'

'That seems very generous.'

'Well she was on the administrative side, and could apparently do quite a bit of work at home so it was never a dead loss.'

'What about the man—the father?'

'Nothing doing.' Paully shrugged his shoulders. 'Young man with too much money, knocked around with the arty set. He was training to take over his father's business—that's how he met the er . . . deceased—' Paully hesitated before using the formal term—'her firm handled their publicity. Very cut up he was when he heard that she was dead, London say. Declared that he wanted to marry her, but his father wouldn't have any of it, didn't consider the girl good enough'—Paully sneered—'and this the age of democracy. Anyway the old man threatened to cut his son off without a penny—very high-handed type by all accounts. Must still think he's living in the nineteenth century. The lad hadn't got the guts to break away and earn his own living. Wanted to carry on living over the brush with her, until his father died or became more amenable. She wouldn't have that and he hasn't seen her for over a year. Course he blames himself now, like they always do when it's too late.'

'And there's no possibility that he might have done it? If he was planning to get engaged or married, she might have threatened to break it up or something. Started putting the pressure on. Perhaps a little bit of blackmail?'

'Inspector Aldwych was thinking along those lines sir'—the chief winced—'But he just couldn't have done it. He has an alibi as solid as a rock. Like I said, he's training to

take over his father's business. Going through the whole works, learning the job from top to bottom. For the last three weeks he's been clocking in every morning at his father's factory—and clocking out again every night. They're doing research work on some new alloys. Got a government contract, and they're red hot on security. Once he got inside, he could no more have got out without being seen than he could have escaped from Dartmoor. He was at the factory all day long on Thursday, no doubt of it.'

'Well that's that then,' the chief said when Paully had finished.

'Yes sir. It looks as if it must have been somebody local after all.'

'At least that narrows it down, but on the other hand, it also means that we have no more excuses for not finding the murderer. We can't hang about now. Whoever it was we've got to catch him pretty quick.' The chief shook his head. 'It means that we'll have to start covering the same old ground again, I suppose—the old boy friend and all that.'

'Well sir we know that the murderer drove that van which was seen parked on the lane. We also know that she must have been closely acquainted with him to go for a walk in the woods like that. We got nowhere with the old boy friend angle before, so what about checking on the people who she's been seeing since she came back home? I reckon that as she had only been back for just over a week, and by all accounts hadn't left the house except to go to work at the pub and do a bit of shopping in the village, then it must have been one of these places where she met the chap.'

'That doesn't help us much as far as I can see.' The chief leaned forward across his desk. 'Could be any of a number of people, with that new estate at Barlowmoor, and situated as it is by the bus terminal, the Stag must get a fantastic shifting custom. I shouldn't be surprised if every man from the estate doesn't pop in at some time in the

course of the week. Could be anybody from there, or from Barlow Bridge.'

'Anybody with a van sir.'

'Lots of people drive those little vans nowadays. There must be hundreds of them knocking about.'

'I think perhaps we can narrow it down even further sir,' Paully said. 'After all, she hardly had time to get to know anybody well since coming back. I think the murderer must have been some old acquaintance whom she chanced to meet in the pub or perhaps when she was out shopping.'

'That seems reasonable enough, but I don't see how it is going to help us much.'

'It leaves us with this to go on sir: A man who drives a van, has lived in the district for at least four years and who probably drinks at the Stag.'

The chief nodded.

'And sir, the estate wasn't built four years ago so it can't be anyone from there. And no one in Barlow Bridge drives a van or any other vehicle—the road in is practically impassable as I found out the other day.'

'But if you're right, that's going to make a great deal of difference.' The chief picked up the shrunken head paper-weight and weighed it thoughtfully in his hand. 'Why, the man we are looking for must be one of not more than half a dozen or so at the most.'

'One of five as a matter of fact sir. I've already checked. First there's Jack Scott—he's a milkman employed by a dairy in Rutlidge and his round is on the estate. He was at the same school as Jenny Greenhouse, so he must have known her since they were kids. What's more, he is known to be a violent type—he's a big fellow—plays a bit of rugby—and he's a bully. We've had trouble with him ourselves. He's been picked up for assault and battery a couple of times.

'Then there is Bert Tatlers, the landlord of the Stag—he drives a van. Of course he's only been in the pub a couple of years and never knew Jenny before she went to

London, but he is probably the one man who might have seen her often enough to get intimate with her.

'Next there is a window cleaner—Cliff Chadwick—he's a local man, saw his opportunity to set up in business when the estate was built. And last of all there are old John Morgan and his son Harry. They used to be farmers, but they run a store now and they have a van to make deliveries. We can soon eliminate one of those two because they wouldn't both be in it at the same time.'

'Only five!'

'There might be a couple more sir, but those were all that I could dig up.'

'Five, seven, what's the difference? If you're right—and I think that you are—we'll sort the murderer out of that little bunch in no time,' the chief said confidently. 'But why didn't you think of all this before?'

'Well I did sir,' Paully said, 'and that's why I did a little checking of my own; but Inspector Aldwych seemed convinced that it would turn out to be this boy friend from London.'

'Aldwych!' the chief snorted. He patted Paully on the shoulder. 'You've done well lad. We might get this wound up quicker than I thought.'

'I've got a full report written out sir. It's not typed I'm afraid, I didn't have time.'

'That doesn't matter.' The chief took the sheets of foolscap from Paully, and rapidly scanned the small, precise handwriting. 'I can read it all right. I'll handle the rest of this business. I'm sorry to have to take you off the case now that it seems as if we're getting somewhere—especially after it's you who's cracked it. But there is still the other matter. Those two are still on the moors. I want you to handle the search tomorrow. I've arranged with the army about those walkie-talkies and they should be a big advantage. The press gave me a hard time earlier tonight. They didn't believe all that "lost on the moors" stuff and they think that Cartwright did the murder and we're just trying to

cover up because we let him escape. It'll all be there to-morrow—you know what they are when a child is involved—we'll get a roasting. But wouldn't it take the wind out of their sails if we had the whole thing wrapped up for to-morrow night?'

'I'll certainly do my best to find them sir,' Paully said.

'Good lad, that's enough for me. And as for the murder, if it was one of those five, I'll soon have it out of him. He won't pull no wool over my eyes, you'll see. I'm used to handling men, nothing like an army career to teach you that. Are the names and addresses of the men in your report?'

'Yes sir.'

'Right, fine. Now you had better get going. You'll need to get some sleep—want to be tip-top in the morning.'

The chief showed Paully to the door, then reached for the telephone. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have somebody out right away checking the alibis of that lot.

Mr and Mrs Cartwright sat in front of the fire in the sitting-room. They didn't talk.

All day Mr Cartwright had waited at the police station, hoping for news. Nothing, until at last the search party had returned and told him that there had been an accident—nothing serious, but it had delayed them. The search would have to be called off until the following day. At first light they would be out again.

So Mr and Mrs Cartwright sat in front of the fire, not talking about it. Just thinking about the next day of waiting.

Mrs Starter was ironing, trying to keep her mind off little Johnny, lying somewhere outside in the dark and cold. All day she had kept herself busy about the house. Doing out all the rooms, taking the carpets up, scrubbing the floors, washing. She felt that she must keep herself occupied. Must

not allow herself to start thinking about Johnny. The wind was coming up, and he had never been very strong. Out in the open, just after having got over a cold a few weeks past, and only with two blankets. He always had at least three on his bed at home even, and it became so damp at nights with the mist and fog coming down.

In the lounge of a pub at Edale, Vinney Whitehead tipped his Cisco Kid hat forward over his eyes to shield them from the glare of the light. He stepped forward to the row of studs in the composition floor and threw a dart at the black and yellow board. A tall pale man with big bony hands and feet was playing a guitar. He was playing blues and singing softly:

‘I once worked for a son of a gun,
Jesse Howard was his name,
Six foot seven in his stocking feet,
As tall as any crane.
His hair hung down in rat’s tails,
Round his lean and lantern jaw.
He was the picturegraph of every man
In the state of Arkansas.’

At the end of the verse he went straight onto something else singing to the tune of ‘The Red Flag’:

‘The working class can lick my arse,
I’ve got the foreman’s job at last.’

Vinney threw another dart at the board.

‘Here you going to go out on that search tomorrow Fats?’

Fats was sitting in the corner, his arm round a dirty fifteen-year-old girl with long, colourless, greasy, straggling hair. They had been camping out on Kinder Scout all week-end and had heard the police request for volunteers over

the radio in the pub, where they were having a few drinks before getting the ten-thirty bus back into Manchester.

'You bet—any excuse not to go to work. Warrabout you Gypsy? You coming tomorrow?'

'Sure.' Gypsy was nineteen years old. He wore a single gold ear-ring, half hidden by one of his luxurious ginger sideboards. In his hand he was holding a hefty, long-bladed sheath knife that he was using to carve his nick-name in the table top.

The man playing the guitar stopped singing. He was older than the others.

'Here,' he said, 'it's going to be right funny helping the gestapo for a change in' it?'

'Watcha worried about as long yer can ger outta going to work Sailor?'

'Yer but it'll feel funny like won't it . . . I mean being with the gestapo.' Sailor started plucking at the strings of his guitar again. He was thirty but looked older because all his front teeth had been knocked or kicked out. He was a drifter. Having nothing in common with men his own age he mingled with the yobos. They didn't really like him, but they tolerated him because of his guitar playing. Fats, Gypsy and Vinney had known Sailor since they were at school, then they had admired him—almost worshipped him—because he'd done a stretch for car-stealing. As sixteen-year-olds, they had been flattered by his company. It hadn't taken them long to realize what a weakling he was, but by that time he had established himself in the pattern of their lives and they continued to accept him.

'Who are they searching for anyway?' Gypsy asked.

'Somebody what's run off with a little lad.'

'It didn't say that on the wireless—just said that they were lost.' Vinney pushed his hat to the back of his head and looked at Fats.

'That's only what gestapo say. They're just saying that. Look if they were lost, they wouldn't be asking motorists to

watch the roads would they? 'Cause if they were on a road they wouldn't be lost any more would they? See?' Fats was scornful.

Vinney shrugged his shoulders and threw another dart at the board. He had wedged a match under the wire near the bull and was trying to strike it by hitting the head with a dart. All night he had been throwing at the match, but he had never managed to hit it.

'You'll never hit it Vinney,' Gypsy said. He threw his sheath knife up in the air and caught it by the blade. Suddenly he threw the knife at the dart-board. It struck the board pommel first and bounced back, just missing Vinney's foot.

'Hey watch what you're doing Herbert,' Vinney jumped back. The knife was stuck in the floor. 'That nearly hit my foot.'

'What you worrying about, you've got another one on the end of your other leg. You're getting chicken,' Gypsy said. He reached down and retrieved the knife. Fats laughed loudly, showing a mouthful of broken, carious teeth. He fingered a bruise on his cheekbone. He had got the bruise in a fight the night before. There had been forty people in it altogether, two gangs—the Yipps and the Kinder Indians—from Sheffield and Manchester had been involved. By the time that the police managed to break the scuffle up, Edale had looked like a battlefield. 'Here it's been a right shit hot weekend ain't it?' Fats said. He squeezed his girl-friend's arm until she shrieked. 'Here Vinney, how about getting some ale in?'

'Come off it Fats, I bought you one.'

Sailor started playing a fast rhythm on his guitar. He began to sing again, nasally:

'Someone's been digging my potatoes,
Trampling on my vines,
And I got that worried feeling,
Resting on my mind.

Well I love you in the winter,
I love you in the fall,
But in between the blankets wow,
I love you best of all.

I came in through the window,
I thought I heard a sigh,
I thought I heard somebody say: "Wow,
Take your hand off my thigh."

Well my potato's green,
Your potato's red,
I thought you was my friend
Until I caught you in my bed.
Someone's been digging my potatoes
Trampling on my vines. . . .

Bert Tatlers was just closing up the Stag. It wasn't long after closing time and normally the usual favoured few would have stayed behind to have 'one for the road'. Often the 'one' would extend to two or three and the session might last half the night. But this Sunday, trade had been so brisk that Bert Tatlers was tired out and he hadn't encouraged his cronies to stay. By half past ten, the bar was clear and he was just about to lock up when there was a loud knocking on the front door.

Bert went to the door and shouted through the letter-box.
'Who is it?'

'Police sir, could we just have a word with you?'

He unbolted the door, thanking his lucky stars that the pub was clear for once. He wondered what the police could possibly be after at this time of night.

There were two of them, a uniformed constable and a young plainclothes man. The constable stood by the door with his arms locked behind his back. He looked suspiciously up and down the bar, as if he thought that there might be people hiding there.

It was the detective who spoke.

'Sorry to disturb you at this time sir, but we were going past and saw your light was still on. There are a few questions we would like to ask you. Just a few points we would like to clear up, you understand, but they are rather important, and we think that you may be able to help us. It's to do with your barmaid who was murdered last Thursday.'

'Well I'll be only too pleased to do what I can, but I don't see how I can help. I told all that I know to that sergeant who was here t' other day.' Just like the police coming round bothering him, and Dan Cartwright still loose. That was a cock and bull story about wanting to ask him some questions. They'd thought they were going to catch him serving beer after time.

'Thank you sir.' The detective took out his notebook. 'Now then sir. I believe that you drive a green, Bedford van, licence number CS 426, is that correct?'

'Yes, but I don't see. . . .'

'If you'll just stick to answering the questions sir.' The detective was a cool one. 'Tell me if you please, were you driving in your van at all last Thursday afternoon, say between the hours of three and five?'

'That's the day of the murder isn't it?'

'That is correct sir.'

'Well I didn't have it then.'

'You didn't have it?' the detective raised one eyebrow. 'Then perhaps sir, you could tell me where it was?'

'I don't know what you're trying to get at, but it was in the garage at Rutlidge being overhauled. I'd been meaning to have the mechanics run an eye over her for some time and last Tuesday night I had a bit of a win over at the dog-track, so I decided to treat the old girl. I dropped her in on Wednesday morning first thing, and she's been there ever since. I haven't had cause to do any driving since, so I never bothered going round to collect her. Hardly had time, been so busy since the murder. And short staffed and all.'

‘Could you give me the address of your garage sir?’

‘Certainly. Rutlidge Motor Company. In the High Street.’

‘Yes I know it. Thank you very much sir, that’s all we wanted to know. Just elimination you understand.’

The uniformed constable’s face lit up when Bert Tatlers asked them to have a drink with him. But the young detective took his job very seriously and refused to accept the landlord’s invitation.

Surly one that, Bert Tatlers thought when they had gone. He wondered what all this van business was about. Probably summat and nowt.

Sergeant Paully was sitting in his digs looking at a map. He was pleasantly tired after the walk and was looking forward to the next day. He remembered the application form to join the Rutlidge Fell Walkers’ Club, given to him by Mr Taylor. He took the form out of his inside pocket and began to fill it in. . . .

CULLEN TURNER sat morosely in front of a pink gin, at a corner table in the Thespis club, just behind Trafalgar Square.

The usual contented, slightly superior smile was missing from his mottled, well fed face, and furrows wrinkled a lofty, noble brow—a brow which had become so lofty that it was hard to tell where brow had ended and baldness had begun. Cullen ran a nervous hand through the long grey hair which curled elegantly from the nape of his neck, over the collar of his expensively cut gun-check jacket.

The Crusader was worried.

He couldn't find a cause.

Every Monday morning tea stewed in pots on half the breakfast tables in Great Britain, while the family read the Crusader's column to find out what new evil, previously unnoticed, was threatening to overthrow the country, or destroy the pattern of family life.

Individuals—churchmen, members of parliament, prominent officers of the armed forces, film actors, peers—anyone in the public eye, had been made and broken in the Crusader's column. The Crusader had had calcium introduced into drinking water to strengthen children's teeth, and he had had calcium taken out again to save the housewife's soap bill. The Crusader had caused public libraries to be built, and then had half the books in them banned as likely to pervert the young. The Crusader had slammed town councils for not doing anything about the slums in their various boroughs—and then slammed them again for building estates and letting the houses, at subsidized rents,

to idlers who didn't deserve to be assisted out of the rate-payers' pockets.

Cullen Turner believed in giving the public what they wanted, and early in his career, he had decided that what they wanted most was to be inflamed. So each Monday morning, by means of the Crusader's vitriolic column, he inflamed them.

In print, he raved, he ranted, he insisted, he demanded; he became alternately idealistic and practical, hysterical and icily calm. In private life, he remained prissy, conceited, self-centred; and his paunch grew bigger and his blood pressure higher, as—an unimaginative person—he ate and drank more and more, in proportion to the ever increasing income from his successful formula.

This week it looked as if the Crusader's readers were going to be disappointed. Nothing had happened over the weekend—nothing to inspire Cullen Turner.

He played with the idea of aliens coming to Britain from the Continent to have free medical treatment under the National Health scheme, but he decided against it. It was stale stuff, and besides he'd done something very like it a few weeks before when he accused coloured men of immigrating to live off the National Assistance and the earnings of young girls that they forced to go onto the streets. Coloured men! What was this business of the Sikh not being allowed to work as a bus conductor in his turban? An infringement on the personal freedom of the individual by the town-hall Hitlers. That sounded quite good—and didn't the Sikhs have a notable war record, weren't they the regiment who fought the Japanese with knives during the Burma campaign? Turbans smart enough for General Wingate, but not for the General Transport Manager. Nice! But it sounded familiar. Of course, he'd taken that line before—the Eurasian with the military medal who'd been sacked from the bicycle factory for smoking in the paint shop. The country had been on the verge of a general strike and the bicycle firm had gone bankrupt, before the

final repercussions of the Crusader's explosive article had died away.

Cullen signalled a waiter and ordered another pink gin. He sat listening to the flashy, cocktail-time jazz, played by the pretty, effeminate-looking pianist in the restaurant above, and relayed to the bar by means of a loud-speaker. Coming through the speaker, the music seemed detached, divorced from the instrument—like the incidental music to a film.

'Hello Cully darling.' A blonde, impassive mask of a face above a black sheath dress, wove across the room to his table. The girl sat down, daintily crossing slim ankles. Her skin was pale, translucent except for the face—eyebrows plucked, opaquely made up, the lips purplish. She set her drink—a pint of beer—down on the table. 'How long have you been here darling? I've been over at the bar for hours, waiting for Frederick, with nobody to talk to, and here are you all the time, hiding in your corner like a little, timid thing.'

'Hello Diana. Do commiserate with me lovey. I must produce something for my column, and I can't think of a thing. Absolutely nothing has happened for days, the country is asleep—in swinish slumber—and I have only three hours to meet my deadline. There just is not anything to write about.'

'Oh poor dear Richard the Lionheart, turned into a little dormouse,' Diane pouted. 'Gone all drear and nobody to cherish him. Never mind, I shall cheer you up.' She leaned over and kissed him on top of the head. 'There, better now?' She took out a handkerchief and wiped the purple lipstick off his brow. 'I say, do you remember that girl friend Basil used to have?'

'I remember thousands of girl friends that Basil used to have.'

'I mean the terribly intense one that all the row with his father was about—the one who got preggers. Oh you must, Basil had a great thing about her and went round

oozing tragedy for weeks afterwards. She was quite pretty in an earthy sort of way, she came from Wigan.'

'Darling Diana,' Cullen said. 'You think that everyone who wasn't born in the Home Counties comes from Wigan.'

'Cully that is not fair; I do not; I don't think that Frenchmen and Chinamen come from Wigan and I'm sure they weren't born in the Home Counties. Anyway, you know what I mean, she spoke like one of those comedians; but imagine what—she's been murdered! Strangled!'

'Has she really?'

Diana nodded: 'Yes, back up north somewhere.'

'In Wigan of course,' Cullen laughed.

'Now you are being facetious.'

'*Facetious*, Diana dear, what a wonderful word for this time of the evening. Really your vocabulary is extending enormously. You'll be leaving me way behind soon if you carry on like this. Wherever did you learn it?'

'Frederick bought me a dictionary if you must know. He said that if I was to ever get on then I must improve my word power. He told me to read a page a day and try to remember as many new words as possible, so I started with the "F" page, because his name begins with "F", and I think that it's such a splendid letter. But if you don't stop teasing me I shall not talk to you any more!' Diana pouted.

'I'm sorry darling, do go on please,' Cullen took her hand. 'I'm absolutely fascinated.'

'Then you must be very good,' Diana admonished. She leaned intimately across the table. 'It was in the north somewhere. Near Manchester I think—at least Miriam, who told me all about it, read it in a Manchester paper. She was up there last week doing something on the television—a play I think. She only came back this morning, and she came right round to tell me. She showed me the paper—there were pictures and everything. She had been strangled in a wood.'

'Who Miriam?'

'No, Basil's old flame Jenny, she was called. It said in

the paper that the police were making inquiries. Well they would be wouldn't they?—I mean even up there where they are probably murdering each other all day long, having nothing but factories and sheep to look at.'

'I don't think that they are quite so uncivilized as all that dear.'

'Well I do. Have you forgotten that man who got drunk and started all the trouble at Jake's party, just because someone poured beer in his hat? After all, they were only having fun and I am sure that he had no need to pick on poor Frederick, who wouldn't harm a soul. I thought that he was going to kill him. As it was, Frederick had a black eye for weeks, and couldn't do the toothpaste advertisement.'

'But darling, he was either a Scotsman or an Irishman. I never could quite make out which.'

'Well he had been to Liverpool, and that's round there somewhere.' Diana stretched her slim body. 'I wonder whether they have captured the murderer yet?'

'We can quite easily find that out. I'll just have to give the office a tinkle. They will have somebody covering the story, and the latest news will be on the stones by now.'

'Oh would you Cully?' Diana said enthusiastically. She clapped her hands together. 'That would be absolutely splendid—we should be the first to know.'

'I was going to phone them up in any case to see whether anything had come in that would give me a peg to hang something for my column on.' Cullen's face dropped when he remembered his problem. 'Wait here darling, I'll be right back.'

Cullen walked through the bar to the telephone booth and dialled the number of the newsroom: 'Hello, Cullen Turner here. What have you got on a murder, up north somewhere—Manchester way I think—girl strangled in a wood—yes, I can hold on.' Cullen took a cigarette out with one hand and lit it from a tiny enamelled lighter—'Hello.' The cigarette bobbed up and down in his plump little lips

as he spoke '—yes, I got that much—Jenny Greenhouse, that's the one—she was—yes, and the police still haven't made an arrest?—questioned a backward chap, you say, who has since disappeared—on the moors—with a boy!—out all night?—Search parties . . . They didn't! And a police inspector injured in the search!—Descriptions broadcast on the radio? . . . What did you say?—Of course they're being bloody cagey about it. Didn't they have hold of him once and let him slip through their fingers? Now listen. I want everything we've got on this business waiting on my desk. I'm going to use this for my column—came from a news agency?—well it better be reliable, or we'll hound them out of the union. I can't wait while you check it, not if I'm to meet the deadline—all right, phone the B.B.C., find out if they did broadcast a police message, you can do that at least—Right, fine. Listen, can you put me through to the Night Editor? . . . Hello, Fred, I think I'm onto something good. It's this murder up north—the girl who was strangled. Can you put a box on the front page to draw attention to the story?—I know it's late and it means altering the layout, but can't you do it just this once? This is going to be big. . . . Have I ever let you down before?—Fine, thanks very much Fred. See you later, in about ten minutes.'

Cullen put the receiver back on the rest. He left the booth and returned to the table in the bar where Diana was still sitting. He hurriedly finished his drink and seized his overcoat. 'Darling, you are an angel, and I love you, but I must dash.'

'But you said that you would find out about the murder.'

'I haven't time now, but I promise to come back and reveal all later. I shan't be more than an hour lovey, and I promise you, when I return I shall fill your pint pot with brandy. 'Bye darling, see you later.'

Outside the club, Cullen hailed a taxi and sped through the streets to Fleet Street.

He went into the newsroom first and had a quick word

with the night editor. Then he went into his own office and sieved through the various reports on his desk. After he had finished, he sat thinking for a few moments with his eyes closed, then he inserted a piece of paper into his typewriter and fingered the keys rapidly:

'SOMEWHERE IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND A MOTHER WEEPS.

Her eleven-year-old son has disappeared with a man who has a record of mental instability, and who has already been questioned by the police in relation to the recent murder of a twenty-four-year-old girl.

They are together somewhere in the grim Pennine hills, which the combined police forces of two counties, assisted by volunteers from local climbing and hiking clubs, have been combing all day with no success. Not surprising when one considers the extent of rough, uninhabited moorland, which they have to cover.

What can that mother be thinking, knowing that her little boy is alone with this man, in such wild, lonely country?

Of course the police are doing their best, as always—indeed an inspector has been injured in the search—but is their best enough? Need any of this have ever happened?

Once again the time has come when we must ask ourselves:

"SHOULD SUCH MEN BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN FREE UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THEY TRANSGRESS THE LAW? UNTIL BLOOD IS SHED, OR SOME INNOCENT YOUNG CHILD MADE TO SUFFER AN EXPERIENCE THE MEMORY OF WHICH WILL AFFECT HIM FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE?"—I say NO, and I am sure that most readers will agree with me when . . . '

After he had finished the article, Cullen Turner read it through, made a couple of trifling alterations, then rang for a copy boy.

‘Get that down to the stones right away.’

The Crusader walked out into the street, whistling cheerfully to himself. The taxi was still waiting for him.

‘Back to the Thespis club,’ he told the driver. He looked at his wrist-watch and smiled with self-satisfaction. Why he hadn’t been much more than half an hour, and one of the best things that he had ever written.

BLACK AND merciless, Rutledge's dark chimneys thrust like spears at the heavens from the dawn-grey silhouette of houses, ugly on the hilly skyline, belching smoke that lingered in the damp, heavy air. Over to the west was the business centre. Fantastic minarets and crazy towers failed to lend grace to the municipal buildings, the banks, the insurance offices, the covered market; each monstrosity alike aspiring to be something else, whimed by the romanticism of Victorian architects who, ruled by nineteenth-century functionalism beneath, could only express their dreams of grandeur in terms of futile pinnacles above.

The chief turned away from the window, and stood behind his desk, looking down at an open newspaper.

'“Somewhere in the north of England a mother weeps”,' he read to himself aloud. He angrily screwed up the paper and flung it into the elephant's-foot waste-basket.

Someone knocked on the door.

'Come in,' the chief barked. He spread some reports out on his desk and peered down at them, pretending to be busy. A pair of feet walked into his field of vision. Dainty feet in Italian styled shoes, with pointed toes. The chief didn't quite approve, too flashy! The chief pretended to scrutinize the papers for a few moments longer, then looked up. Above the feet were a pair of legs in neat, tapered, bird's-eye-patterned, grey trousers; then a pale, showerproof overcoat and a thin, serious face beneath a Robin Hood hat.

'Well?' the chief said.

'I came in to report sir.' It was the cool young detective who had questioned Bert Tatlers the previous evening.

He took out his notebook. 'I checked up on those people just as you ordered sir.'

'Ahah?' the chief sat down in his squeaky swivel chair, and lit a cigarette.

'I saw Herbert Tatlers—that's the landlord of the Stag hotel—last night. His van was in a garage, being serviced. He had taken it in on Wednesday, and as he has had no cause to want to use the van since, he has never bothered to collect it. Of course, I checked with the garage, and they confirmed his story, so that puts him in the clear. I haven't seen either John or Harry Morgan personally, but when I called round at their place this morning, the housekeeper—a Mrs Bolton—told me that John Morgan had been laid up for a week with varicose veins. She told me that every now and then he gets completely crippled with them and has to stop in bed for a while. I could have gone up to question the old man, but as the housekeeper woman said that the son—Harry that is—was out in the van all afternoon on the day of the murder, I didn't think that there was any need to disturb him.'

'Why didn't you see the son?' the chief asked.

'It's Monday sir, and when I called he had already gone to the market in Manchester, getting in vegetables for the shop, the same way that he does every Monday. The housekeeper said that he went off at about six-thirty and wouldn't return until nine or so. She said that I might find him at the shop later, but that I would be lucky, because whilst his father is ill, he spends most of the day driving round the estate, making deliveries. Which is just what he was doing on Thursday afternoon.'

'Yes and if he was on the estate, that means that he was never very far away from Hall Wood.' The chief thoughtfully rubbed his ear. 'What about the other two, the man from the dairy and the window cleaner?'

'Jack Scott and Clifford Chadwick.' The young detective consulted his notebook again. 'They both admit to being in the district during the period that we're interested in,

going about their business. I got lists off both of them of the places they visited, but their alibis will take a bit of checking sir. You know how difficult people can be when it comes to remembering precise times, and it was four days ago.'

'Quite, so it seems as if it must have been one of those three. They all knew Jenny Greenhouse pretty well, and they all had an opportunity to meet her on Thursday afternoon, and to kill her. But they also all had a legitimate reason for being in the neighbourhood. The problem is to eliminate one of them, and that is not going to be easy—we might just do it by checking on their rounds, but I doubt it. Who will remember what time the milkman or the grocer called round, nearly a week ago?'

'There is one more thing sir. I found out that last Wednesday night, the murdered girl gave Jack Scott a real dressing down in public at the Stag. She didn't half tell him off I was told, and he is the sort to bear a grudge. Real nasty piece of work I thought he was. I wouldn't put it past him to finish somebody off if he lost his temper.'

'And if she disliked him enough to tear a strip off him in public, that makes it so much less likely that he was her boy friend doesn't it?' the chief said coldly. 'And the medical evidence suggests that they were rather close you remember. Even in this age of sexual promiscuity,' the chief sniffed, 'I should imagine that the evidence suggests that they were on speaking terms at least.'

'Yes sir.' The serious young detective turned red. 'I never thought sir.'

'Well do think in the future. Now this is still going to take a bit of cracking. I'm going to get every available man on the case questioning the people on the estate and in the village. You can start at Barlow Bridge. Try to find out whether the deceased was friendly—particularly friendly—with any of those three before she went away. We've tried the old boy friend angle once before without any success, but a name might just jog their memories.'

‘What about the alibis sir?’

‘Leave the lists of places that Jack Scott and Clifford Chadwick visited and I’ll have a couple of uniformed men go round and check them. You must concentrate on questioning the people over at Barlow Bridge.’

‘Yes sir.’ The serious young detective left his notebook on the desk, turned smartly and walked out. Walked out a little bit too abruptly for the chief’s liking. He’ll bear watching, that chap, the chief thought. Ambitious and tending to be a little bit insubordinate. Keen enough and probably able, but he would need to be kept in his place. A spell back in uniform might not be a bad idea when this lot was over. The chief smiled to himself, he was pleased that he had been able to bowl the young detective out over that Jack Scott business.

The chief pressed the buzzer on his desk. It was answered only seconds later by the elderly constable who had only just been put into plain clothes.

‘Yes sir.’ The elderly constable was panting slightly. It was obvious that he had run up the flight of stairs from the C.I.D. room. The chief approved. That was what he liked to see, respect and quick obedience to a superior officer, not the assured nonchalance of some of these younger chaps. Probably an old army man this.

‘I want you to go over to Forty Row and question the people who live there . . .’ the chief began. He proceeded to give the elderly constable instructions similar to those that the young detective had received a few minutes before.

A waterboard employee plodded slowly along the track beside the reservoir in Ribbondale. It was drizzling dimly and he had thrown an old bit of sacking over his head and shoulders to keep them as dry as possible during the long trudge up the valley.

He had been sent out to clear a filter at the head of the reservoir. The filter was blocked with silt washed down by the heavy spring rains, and by the streams swollen by

melted snow. It would mean a whole morning's hard graft with a shovel to get the filter functioning again.

What did the super' have to pick on him for?—As if he didn't know. Just because he'd once heard him cursing the Irish and his name happened to be Dooley. He didn't know that the super' was Irish—he didn't talk like no Irishman he'd ever met, even if he was called Dooley.

The super' had taken it as a slight, though and ever since then he'd picked on him for all the dirty jobs and the hard graft. Only Friday he'd sent him all the way up to the moor behind Burnplatt's Leap to read the rain gauge. He could have just as easily sent somebody else. Pure victimization, that's what it was. A straightforward case of pure victimization. The super' would never have ~~got~~ away with it if he'd been running a pit instead of a reservoir. Trouble was that there was no loyalty among workmates on the reservoir. Came of too many casual workers, too much coming and going, no unity. That's what had started the trouble in the first place, casual workers. It was those two Irishmen coming along in the summer and acting like they owned the waterworks, then chucking up as soon as the weather got bad in November, leaving them short-staffed and all with extra work to do. Who could blame you for grumbling when that happened? Leaving you in the lurch first time there was owt to do—and after sunbathing all summer. How was he to know that the super' could overhear him? And how was he to know that the super' would take it personal? He hadn't meant to cause offence. You weren't even allowed freedom of speech. It were more like being in a concentration camp than on a reservoir.

He paused and his nostrils twitched. Something burning! Wood-smoke! The plantation couldn't be on fire on a morning like this. It must be campers, and camping was forbidden on the waterboard's land. It was trespassing and water pollution. He'd show them.

Glad of an opportunity to vent his bad temper on somebody, he quickened his pace, and hurrying round a corner

of the track, he came to the little toolshed, where Johnny and Dan had slept.

They had run out of paraffin for the stove, and were cooking their breakfast over a fire of twigs of scented Scots pine, producing the fragrant, blue smoke that the waterworks' man had smelled.

Johnny and Dan crouched over the flames, getting as much warmth as possible, on the cold, damp morning that was so different from the dawning of the day before.

'Hoy you!' the waterworks' man shouted. 'Hoy you, what do you think you're doing?'

They turned quickly round, startled by the shout. When he saw them from the front, the waterworks' man stopped dead, his feet slithering on the muddy surface of the track. He was even more surprised than they were. That great big fellow, and with a boy! It must be him that the wireless had been on about, and what had been in the papers this morning—that maniac!

The waterworks' man stood transfixed, staring at them. Johnny and Dan stared back. Slowly they rose to their feet. Dan was clutching his walking stick.

'Get back,' the waterworks' man said. What an enormous fellow the maniac was, and armed with a stick too. He wasn't going to try and tackle him. The waterworks' man turned and scuttled back the way he had come, stumbling and slipping in his hurry. The sacking slipped from his shoulders, but he never noticed. By the time he came to the superintendent's house, by the dam, at the end of the track, he was wet through and breathless.

He pushed the back door open without knocking, and charged straight into the kitchen. The superintendent was sitting by the fire in his shirt sleeves, his braces dangling down behind him. He was reading the morning paper. His wife, still in her dressing-gown, and with her hair up in curling pins was at the table, drinking a cup of tea.

They both looked up, flabbergasted at his sudden appear-

ance. He stood by the open door, trying to get enough breath to talk.

'Here,' the superintendent's wife said. She was small, dark and shrewish. 'What do you mean coming barging in like that without so much as a how's your Charlie?'

'He's there, up the dale, by the toolshed,' the waterworks' man panted. He slammed the door behind him. 'I saw him there cooking his breakfast.'

'Saw who?' the woman asked.

'Him, that maniac, the one in the paper this morning—him who kidnapped that little lad—what they been asking on the wireless about. I saw him there, up the dale, with a great stick in his hand. Started coming for me he did, coming for me. He'd of had me an' all if I hadn't of been pretty nifty on my feet.'

The woman spilled her cup of tea over the dirty plates on the table.

'He's not on the way here is he?' she asked, alarmed.

'I don't know. As soon as he starts coming at me, I cleared off sharpish. I weren't mixing it with no maniac. He were like a house end he were—big as a double decker bus. I let no mud stick to my clogs I can tell you.'

'Here George, lock the door,' the woman told her husband. 'Lock the door in case he gets a-gate trying to get in.'

'Don't you think perhaps we ought to do something?' the superintendent said slowly, standing up and nervously pulling his braces over his shoulders. 'I mean don't you think that we ought to try and get the little lad away?'

'That's for the police to do, I'm not having you seen off by no maniac—you're not worth much, but you're the best I've got. Here you—' she turned to the waterworks' man, who was still standing by the door, gasping for breath. 'Get the door locked and bolted, George will be a-gate with his buttons all morning.'

The man quickly did as he was told. Then, no longer overawed at being in the superintendent's house—for after

all, it was an emergency—he sat down in one of the tatty basket chairs by the fireplace, his hand on his chest.

‘I’m sure I strained my heart—running all that way—it’s not good for a man at my time of life—I can feel it, all across here like red hot iron bands.’ He drew an imaginary line across his chest with a stumpy finger. ‘All across my chest, like red hot iron bands. Constricting.’

‘Well you’ll get your breath back a long sight quicker if you keep your cakehole shut,’ the woman said. She turned to her husband, who was still trying to fasten his braces with one hand, while he was pushing the other into one sleeve of his navy blue jacket with the brass buttons. ‘And what exactly do you think that you are doing?’

He stood, looking back at her. He had got his right arm in his left sleeve and the tangle was becoming a bit too much for him.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I think that we ought to do something. I mean like, I ought to have my uniform on, oughtn’t I? In case he comes here like.’

‘A fat lot of difference it will make when we’re all up in heaven sitting on a damp cloud, playing harps with our heads chopped off, whether you were wearing your uniform or whether you weren’t. Now get upstairs and telephone the police. You’ll have plenty of time to start dressing yourself up as the admiral of the fleet while they’re on their way. Heaven knows they’ll probably take their own sweet time getting here. And you,’ she said to the labourer, ‘get your bum off that chair and stand by the window. If you see him coming, shout out.’

The waterworks’ superintendent went off slowly up the stairs, still trying to struggle into his jacket.

‘Do you know where my cap is?’ he shouted to his wife, when he reached the top.

‘You don’t need your cap on to make a telephone call. They can only hear you, they can’t see you.’ She walked to the window. She pushed the labourer aside and gazed out at the grey, rain-washed landscape. ‘If only we had a

gun. I always said that we should have a gun, living this far out. We ought to have a gun, ought to have one kept ready, it's too late when you need it. I always told George that he should get a gun.'

'What's the number?' her husband called from upstairs.
'What's the number?'

'Never mind that, just tell the operator to put you through to the police station at Ribbonbottom, this is an emergency isn't it?' She turned to the window again and looked out up the narrow winding track, between the reservoir on the right and the plantation, clinging to the steep hill-side on the left. There was still no sign of movement. 'Just think, he might have been lurking round out there all night, watching us. Could have crept in while it was dark and murdered us in our beds.'

From upstairs, they could hear the superintendent, slowly talking into the telephone.

As soon as the waterworks' man had turned and retreated down the path, Johnny and Dan, expecting more people to come along at any moment, had hurriedly dowsed their fire and packed up their gear, leaving their half-cooked breakfast in the pan.

By the time that the police received the call from the waterworks' superintendent, they were ready to set off back up the hill.

HARRY MORGAN was sitting in his van. He had pulled up in a quiet side street on the estate.

Why had the police been round asking Mrs Bolton questions? he wondered. They must be suspicious. But why—what reason could they possibly have to suspect him?

In his mind he pondered over the events of the previous few days—ever since he had first met Jenny in the Stag. There was just no way that they could know anything. No way! Unless. . . .

The van!

Of course, it was the van that they had been questioning Mrs Bolton about. She had said that: 'A bobby were round here this morning, said he were making inquiries, wanted to know whether it were you or thy dad as were out in the van on Thursday afternoon.'

And the van had been parked in the lane by the wood for over an hour. Somebody must have seen it there. That was it, someone must have walked down the lane and seen the van.

But so what? That didn't prove anything. Didn't prove anything at all. Most days he was out in the van, delivering on the estate. Admittedly he had been way off his usual route, but he could easily find some excuse for that. He could say that the van's radiator needed water and that he'd parked where he did, whilst he got some water from the Goose Pond, further down the lane. No, that wouldn't do. If he needed water, the obvious thing would be to ask for it at one of the houses where he delivered. Get it in a jug from someone's tap, rather than go messing about at a muddy pond with an empty petrol can. No he would have

to think of something better than that. The police would check his story of course, and they would have to be satisfied, otherwise they would start checking back, and once they got going there would be no holding them. They might find out that he had once knocked about with Jenny, then they would soon put two and two together.

What reason could he give for being in the lane there? Out in the fields, past the houses where he should have been delivering? Out in the fields . . . Out in the fields—farmland. Yes, that would do, he could tell them that he was sick of working in the store and wanted to get back to farming. That he'd gone out there to look for suitable pasture, intending to start again. After all people were always saying that he didn't look like a shopkeeper. They were always saying it. 'You just don't look right behind a counter Harry somehow—it's hard to imagine you anything except a farmer.' Yes, they would have to believe him if he said that he had been weighing up the fields by the Goose Pond, thinking of buying them for grazing land. Hadn't he been brought up to farming, wasn't it his trade? Nothing would be more logical than that he wanted to go back on the land.

Harry decided that as soon as he had finished his morning round, he would drive into Rutlidge and visit the police station. Say that he believed they wanted to ask him a few questions, and as he was passing that way, he thought he might as well drop in and save them the trouble of driving out to Barlowmoor again. It would seem better if he went of his own accord. The farming story would be sure to satisfy them.

Harry Morgan started up the van and drove on, feeling more assured. He didn't know that the conscientious Paully had carefully traced his track across the field to where he had joined Jenny, and then followed their route through the wood itself to the fallen log.

When Harry Morgan entered the Central Police station

at Rutledge, the large, outer office was deserted except for a vague, dim figure seated against the wall, behind a large desk. None of the electric lights were turned on, and the man wore a trilby hat, pulled down over his eyes, like the detectives in films. His face was in a shadow and in the dismal gloom of the office, Morgan couldn't make out the features. Just a pale grey blob, nebulous, impersonal and strangely terrifying, beneath the hat. The man didn't speak, but Harry could feel the eyes watching him. Small suspicious eyes, he imagined they would be, piercing, missing nothing.

'I'm Harry Morgan,' he said cheerfully, just a little bit too cheerfully.

The man sat silent, not bothering to answer. Simply waiting. His hands were in his pockets and Harry realized that he could see none of his flesh at all. Only the hat and the fawn overcoat with the turned-up collar, and the hole between the collar and the hat, and in the hole the faint suggestion of a grey mask, from which he could feel those piercing little eyes, assessing him, taking him in. It was like talking to a ghost, somebody who wasn't really there.

'I came about my van—it was on the lane last Thursday, near Hall Wood, in the afternoon.'

The figure moved slightly.

'Aye?' he spoke the monosyllable slowly and with a Scots accent. It was clearly meant as a question, asking him to explain himself without betraying what the questioner was thinking.

Harry had heard about these third-degree methods, but he wasn't going to be panicked. That was the idea, to make him nervous, to make him panic. All he had to do was keep calm and stick to his story. As long as he did that, he had nothing to get nervous about, they couldn't prove a thing.

But the detective was a Scotsman. Scotsmen were canny—he would have to keep his tongue guarded, have to be careful what he said.

'Went over there to have a look at some grazing land. You know, for farming. Thinking of starting up again like; if I could fence off the top of Raven Vale, a few cows would be all right in those fields there, get the Goose Pond cleared of weeds, it would make a good watering place.'

'Aye?' slower than ever, and still a question.

'Never liked working in the shop much see. Rather be out of doors you see. You know when we lost the farm—compulsory purchase it was, by the council, so that they could use the land for houses. Well it was my dad's idea to open the store, but I never liked it. Farming was what I always liked, what I was brought up to like, never done anything else until lately. That's why I was over there Thursday see. Thinking of buying those fields and starting up on my own.'

'Aye?'

'Well that's why my van was on the lane you see. I'd parked it there while I had a walk round, sort of looking things over.'

'Aye?'

Couldn't the Scotsman say anything else? And shouldn't he be taking all this down?

No, of course, he wouldn't take it down the first time. He would want him to repeat his story, want him to go through it all again. Hoping to catch him out. Hoping that he would contradict himself. It was a good job that he had it all off pat.

Harry stood, silently waiting, feeling the man's eyes watching him. Why didn't he speak, why didn't he ask any questions? What more did he want him to say?

The clock on the station wall ticked loud and steady in the dim, still room.

Suddenly Harry spoke again.

'You know it's a good time to go in for farming,' he said. He could feel the sweat standing on his forehead, and moist in the small of his back. His hands were clammy, and he was desperately trying to keep them from shaking. 'Plenty

of subsidies from the government. Why, if I were to get me a couple of calves tomorrow, I'd be eligible for a subsidy straight off—no trouble—as long as I promised to sell them to the Meat Marketing Board, soon as they were ready for slaughter. Get a subsidy for feed—right away—just like that, for the asking, no bother at all. If I could get hold of that pasture and stock it up, and with what money I've got saved, I'd be laughing, have enough capital to keep me going until the returns started coming in. And there are other subsidies as well, grants and so on.'

'Oh aye?'

Christ! Harry felt that he could never go through with it. He had never thought that he would have to go through anything like this. Questions he could answer, but how was he to face this terrifying, faceless suspicion? But he must go on now, see it through somehow.

'Everybody says that I look wrong behind a counter. They all say that I should still be farming. Everywhere I go people say it—everybody, always, everywhere, I mean—it's what I'm cut out for, everybody says it. It's not just because of the subsidies, even without them I'd manage somehow, got to get back on the land, back outside—can't stand being inside all the time—got to be out in the open. Everybody says the same: "You should still be driving a tractor Harry, not a van." That's what they say. I was never cut out to work in a shop, you can see that can't you? Got to be back on the land. Things have never been right for me since the farm went. Got to. . . .'

A door on the right opened and a uniformed sergeant entered.

The detective—he must have signalled for him in some way. They would want him to repeat it all now, while they took everything down. The sergeant looked very curiously at Harry Morgan, then at the Scotsman.

'It's very dark in here,' he said. 'Better have a light on I think.' He pressed a switch by the door he had just come through. The Scotsman's face was revealed to Harry as

rather pleasant, a wrinkled, smiling face, with twinkling blue eyes beneath bushy white brows.

'Well here you are Mr McLoughry, we've got it all made out for you. Of course this certificate only allows you to stock firearms in your antique shop, it doesn't give you the right to carry one, or to shoot one at any time. I do hope that we haven't kept you waiting too long.'

'Oh no.' The Scotsman stood up and took the firearms' certificate from the sergeant. 'This young fellow here has been talking to me about farming, very interesting, very interesting.'

The sergeant looked at Harry.

'Here sir, are you all right?'

Harry's face was grey, the anti-climax had stunned him; his legs were weak, and he had to support himself by leaning heavily on the desk.

'I . . . I came about the murder . . . I mean, I was looking at some grazing land, got to take up farming again, got to get back on the land.' He was aware of the sergeant and Mr McLoughry looking at him, their mouths open, astonished. Harry laughed hysterically. 'Everybody always says that I don't look right behind a counter.'

The sergeant walked towards him round the desk and stretched out a hand. 'Can I help you sir? Are. . . .'

'No, no. I didn't do it I tell you. I was down there looking for pasture.' Harry backed away. 'Anybody will tell you that I wanted to go back to farming, nothing's gone right for me since I gave it up. Anybody will tell you. I . . . I never meant to harm her. It was when she laughed at me, laughed, I was just trying to keep her quiet. I never meant to . . . never meant to hurt her.'

Suddenly Harry started crying. He huddled against the wall and put his hands to his face, peering up at the sergeant and the Scotsman through his laced fingers. His body shook with sobs, the bottled-up emotion of the past few days suddenly released.

The sergeant signalled to a constable who had heard

the noise and poked his head round the door to see what was going on. 'Better get the chief . . . and Dr Milson.'

'I've never seen nothing like it,' Mr McLoughry said. 'He was just this minute talking to me. Saying how he wanted to get back to farming again. Talking about government subsidies. He seemed a very pleasant young man.'

They looked at Harry Morgan. He had slid down the wall, and was crouched on the floor in the corner, mumbling to himself: 'I didn't mean to kill her . . . I didn't mean to . . . it was when she laughed at me, when she laughed.'

'You had better wait a while longer Mr McLoughry,' the sergeant said. 'The chief might want to ask you a few questions.'

More policemen filtered into the room and stood in a silent group, gazing down at the man on the floor. To Harry, their thick legs looked like tree trunks, and he thought of Jenny, and of Hall Wood. . . .

DETECTIVE SERGEANT PAULLY had started the search from Ribbondale.

The County police had arrived fairly quickly in answer to the waterworks' superintendent's telephone call, but Johnny and Dan had evaded them in the woods and crept through a tunnel under the road. Then they had ascended the stream, back to Burnplatt's Leap, in short stages, dodging from hiding place to hiding place. They were nearly at the top before the county men spotted them, and abandoned their futile searching of the woods.

Paully had been informed immediately. He was organizing his men at Rutledge. There were now about two hundred searchers at his disposal, including the various hiking and climbing clubs, and as many police officers as could be spared.

The detective sergeant was delighted to learn that Johnny and Dan had returned over Burnplatt's Leap. It meant that they were back in the same area as the day before. He split his men up into teams of twenty, then briefed the leaders of the various groups. Each team would start from a different point on one of the various roads that bounded the moors. From there the teams would move inwards. If they could once drive Johnny and Dan into a valley, they would have them trapped.

Each team was accompanied by a radio operator with a walkie-talkie, so that if Johnny and Dan were spotted other teams could immediately be summoned to assist.

Paully's party had followed Johnny and Dan up to Burnplatt's Leap, about two hours behind them.

As they walked up the path beside the stream Paully,

leading the way, thought about the events since the murder. He felt sorry for the Cartwright family—they must be going through a lot. Mr Cartwright had been at the police station the first thing in the morning. He had looked very drawn, very worried. It wasn't surprising, he must have seen the newspapers, and they had already found Dan Cartwright guilty. They didn't say so in so many words, but there was no doubt as to what their innuendo meant, and as for that fellow who called himself the Crusader, he had certainly put the pressure on.

Paully thought what a pity it was that a war hadn't broken out or something. If it hadn't been such a slack news period, there would never have been so much lime-light directed on the search.

Dan and Johnny trudged over the moor, behind Burnplatt's.

There was still no sign of the sun, and the rain still fell steadily. Above, the clouds massed, heavy, damp and broody. A close ceiling, depressing, turning each gully into a prison.

They felt wretched. Two nights in the open were enough, and they were beginning to long for home, and for home cooking. For those rich, too large meals, meals so appetizing that they crammed them down until their swollen bellies could hold no more. Canned soup, beans and half-fried bacon had been a poor substitute.

They walked on miserably, but Johnny was determined not to give in, and Dan was incapable of making a decision without direction. As long as Johnny told him what to do, Dan would keep on doing it, regardless of his own feelings, which were so vague as to remain unrealized even in his mind. But the adventure wasn't an adventure any more; without the sun, the hills were no longer friendly, sheltering them; they had become dark hazards, obstacles to be overcome, concealing traps which threatened to trip and turn ankles.

All the morning they fled on, skilfully avoiding the search parties when they came near, always able to find a hiding place until the risk of being seen was past. Only twice were Johnny and Dan actually spotted, and both times they quickly got away. Once by scrambling up some rocks that delayed their pursuers, allowing them time to double back; the second time, by crawling into a shallow cave between two boulders, the entrance half hidden by the heather. They lay there, flat on their bellies, until the party had gone past, unaware that they had been within a few feet of their quarry.

The two narrow escapes excited them, intoxicated them with a new terror, so that they forgot their discomfort and drove themselves on over the hills and valleys.

But they were tired, very tired.

At about three o'clock, the same time that Harry Morgan was being formally charged in Rutledge Central Police Station, the pace had its effect.

They were climbing up a chimney, splitting one of the massive gritstone outcrops which thrust through the peaty side of one of the deep valleys. Johnny was leading the way up a steep slab of rock which blocked the chimney. The slab was smooth, polished by the water which flowed down the chimney after heavy rain.

As he was nearing the top of the slab, gingerly reaching out for a wrinkle in the rock which would give him a handhold, his rucksack became jammed by a bulge in the wall of the chimney. Instead of using caution and trying to work the rucksack past the obstruction, Johnny panicked and leapt for the safety of the handhold. The pressure of the rucksack against the rock threw him off balance, thrusting him sideways and outwards, so that he missed the hold altogether. One of his feet slipped and he hung for a moment on the slab, precariously held by the friction of his clothing against the rough rock. Then he made the mistake of trying to move again, and his other foot lost its

hold. He slid down the rock, slowly at first, scratching frantically with his finger-nails.

Then his fall gathered momentum; for a lucid moment he was conscious of Dan's white, startled face, before he bounced into space, the valley whirling around him.

He heard the thud of his fall remotely, as if it was all happening to someone else.

He lay there, feeling a dull pain in his side. He felt sick and there was a ringing in his ears. His face was wet and he could not move his legs.

Above him, he could hear Dan's bootnails scraping on the rock as he descended. He lifted his hand and touched the wet side of his face, it was sticky. He slowly moved his hand into his field of vision. Blood! He was glad that he wasn't crying.

The noise of Dan's descent seemed fainter, as if he were getting further away. Further and further away, like the valley and the smell of the damp heather. . . .

'Johnny, 'ere Johnny,' Dan said. Johnny didn't move. Dan bent over him and stroked his forehead. 'Johnny.'

Johnny must be pretending. He did that sometimes. Lay very still for a long time, then jumped up when Dan wasn't watching and surprised him.

But Johnny was hurt.

Dan looked down at his big hand, red with blood from the cut on Johnny's forehead. He would carry him home, like he had done before when he had been tired, and Johnny's mother would make them tea and look after Johnny's head.

He pulled Johnny's rucksack off, then picked him up and set him across his shoulders, holding onto one arm, so that the inert, helpless body wouldn't slip off. Johnny's weight was nothing to Dan, and he carried him easily, swinging the walking-stick knobkerrie with his free hand and singing the Zulu song:

*'Gin gan gulla, gulla, gulla, gulla watwah,
Gin gan goo, gin gan goo. . . .'*

Dan walked down the steep side of the valley below the crag. Get to the bottom, then follow the stream and they would soon be home. Walk along the valley, the valleys always led back home.

Gypsy was throwing his knife at the stump of a tree. Most times he missed, or else the knife didn't land on its point and bounced off into the heather. Once it hit a rock, making sparks and an acrid smell, before flying on into the stream.

'You'll break point off,' Fats said. Fats, Vinney, Sailor and another mate Lordy, were lying on the bank of the stream, watching Gypsy's antics with the knife. Offering unwanted advice and criticism.

'Get stuffed,' Gypsy replied. 'It's my knife in' it? What's it gotta do with you what I do with me own shiv?'

They all laughed as Gypsy stepped gingerly from stone to stone and reached down into the water to retrieve the knife. Fats threw a stone into the stream near Gypsy's foot, splashing water over him.

'Here, quit it will you Fats.' Gypsy came back to the bank, testing the point of the knife against his thumb. 'Point's all right any road.

'He'll never learn to throw it,' Vinney said.

Gypsy stepped back from his target and threw the knife again. For once the flight was true and it struck the decaying tree stump blade first, with a dull thud.

'There, what about that then. How would that be in somebody's guts then?' Gypsy pointed to the knife, deeply buried in the soft wood.

'First time you stuck it in all day.' Vinney raised himself on one elbow and sneered, 'First time all day, in' it Fats? First time all bleeding day.'

'Yeah first time he stuck it in.' Fats agreed. He turned over onto his stomach. 'Anybody got a fag?'

'Why don't you never have any fags of your own Fats?' Vinney said.

'Here lay off Vinney, you was smoking mine all last night.'

'You break my heart.' Vinney threw a crumpled packet to Fats.

'I can throw a knife better than you any road Vinney.' Gypsy pulled the knife out of the tree and wiped the blade on his jeans. He offered it to Vinney, 'Come on show us what you can do. Betcha can't stick it in.'

'What, you been practising for weeks now; if I'd been practising for weeks, I'd of done better nor what you was doing. I'd hit the thing anyway. Anybody can hit the thing it's just like throwing a stone, hitting it—you can't even hit it.'

'Hit it just now didn' I, and it stuck in didn' it?' Gypsy said indignantly.

'First time all day—you've been throwing it long enough. It were bound to stick in sooner or later.' Vinney lay back flat on the grass. Fats threw the packet of cigarettes back to Vinney. They landed on his chest. He let them stay there, watching the packet gently rise and fall with the motion of his breathing.

'Got a light Vinney?' Fats asked.

'Oh bloody hell Fats, ain't you got nothing of your own?' Vinney tossed his lighter across to Fats who was still lying on his belly. The cigarette packet fell off his chest and he picked it up and thrust it into his pocket.

Gypsy threw his knife at the tree-stump and missed. He picked the knife up and sat down beside Vinney, sharpening the blade on a stone.

'It's all right for you to talk Vinney. Anybody can say it—I mean just talking, anybody can talk. I mean it's all bull that. I'd like to see you trying it.' Vinney didn't bother

answering, he'd become bored with the argument, and Gypsy went on sharpening the knife.

'Hey, it's a right lark this search in' it?' Sailor said. The gang had dropped out of the search party an hour before, bored with travelling backwards and forwards over the same stretch of country. After all, as Fats had said, they might as well stop in one place and wait for the rest to come round again—they were sure to.

'Did you see what it said in t' papers this morning,' Lordy asked, 'about him being a maniac?'

'There you are Vinney!' Fats said triumphantly. 'What did I tell you last night?'

'Gestapo sergeant didn't say nowt like that this morning.'

'He said they would probably try to avoid us didn't he?' Fats asked with logic. 'What would they want to avoid us for if they'd done nowt wrong?'

'Gestapo sergeant said they were feared.'

'Well then that feller must of done summat to be feared for then mustn't he?'

'In t' paper it said that they were after him for murder,' Lordy said. 'Crusader were on about it, said it were a disgrace that he'd been allowed to get away.'

'Crusader would know.'

'Now are you convinced Vinney?' Fats asked. 'Here Lordy, who did he murder?'

'Dunno, didn't finish reading it. A bird I think.' Lordy looked at his boots.

'Trust Gestapo not to mention that.' Gypsy stood up and began throwing his knife at the tree stump again.

'Hey Fats, Vinney, look!' Gypsy pointed up the valley. Dan's dark figure was walking along beside the stream towards them, carrying Johnny. 'There he is.'

'Big enough in't he,' Sailor said. They all stood up warily.

'Shout for t' others,' Fats ordered. 'They can't be far away.'

They began to call out. Dan heard them, paused for a moment, then walked uncertainly on towards them.

'That's the little lad he's carrying—what's he done to him?'

'He's bleeding, he must of done him in, the dirty bastard,' Fats said. 'We got to stop him.'

Fats took a karabiner out of his pocket. About three inches long, like a link of chain which could spring open, its legitimate use was to save tying knots when rock climbing. Fats did very little rock climbing, but the karabiner was an ideal knuckle-duster. It could have been made for the job, and he always had a good excuse for its presence if he was picked up by the police. He slipped his fingers through the karabiner.

The gang spread out across the track.

'I'll show the bastard,' Sailor said. 'I'll knock his eyes out.' He was holding a rock in each hand. Gypsy licked his lips, he had his knife ready. Vinney and Lordy clenched their fists, their fingers armoured by heavy death's head and swastika rings.

Dan came closer. When he was only a few yards away he stopped again.

'Where do you think you're going?' Fats said.

The words stumbled from Dan's lips.

'I got to take him home, he fell, I got to take him home.'

'He got to take him home,' Vinney mimicked. They were less apprehensive when they saw Dan at close quarters. He looked soft. Easy meat! They'd soon fix him. Killing girls and kids. They'd show him.

'He's got to take him home,' Gypsy shrieked.

'Put him down,' Fats commanded.

'But I got to take him home,' Dan repeated.

'It'll be better for you if you put him down,' Fats said.

'Let us have a look at him.'

The group started to close in on Dan. Slowly he put Johnny down. He was frightened. He backed away up the track. 'You won't hurt Johnny?'

'No,' Fats said. 'We wouldn't hurt a little lad would we lads?' They laughed. 'We wouldn't hurt a little lad.'

Dan continued to back up the track. He began to sweat. His mouth dropped open, and he watched them through his big, scared, liquid eyes as they stalked after him, dancing lightly from foot to foot like trained boxers.

Suddenly Gypsy threw his knife.

It glanced off Dan's arm, gashing his wrist slightly . . . Dan felt the sudden pain and the warm blood trickling over his hand. He turned clumsily and started to run up the track. Lordy broke a heavy branch off one of the dead trees and flung it after him, tripping him up.

As he tried to get to his feet, the gang leapt onto him. Dan made a feeble effort to shake them off, but his uncoordinated resistance was useless. One of Sailor's loaded fists thudded into his stomach and he doubled up retching. Lordy and Vinney pulled his arms behind his back as Fats smashed him between the eyes with the karabiner, and then in his open mouth, mangling his lips and breaking his front teeth. He fell down onto his hands and knees, his mind dazed and reeling, tasting the blood in his mouth and throat, trying to spit out the splinters of broken teeth.

The gang stood round him, watching him grovelling, trying to crawl away. In his right hand he was still automatically gripping his walking-stick. Gypsy slowly brought his heavy boot down on the hand, gradually increasing the pressure and twisting his foot so that Dan's clenched fingers were lacerated by the nails. Dan screamed at the pain in his hand, and when Gypsy moved his foot, he let go of the stick and raised his broken, bleeding fingers to his mouth. Fats kicked the other hand from under him, so that he fell face downwards onto the track. He lay there, sobbing, whimpering, licking his injured hand.

The gang were just going to start putting their boots in the prostrate figure, when Paully and the rest of the party appeared, attracted by their earlier shouting.

'WELL SERGEANT, how are they?' the chief strode into the ante-room of Rutledge Royal Infirmary, where Paully was waiting for him.

Paully stood up. He had been sitting at a small table, writing out a report in his neat, meticulous handwriting.

'The boy is the most severely injured sir. Concussion, three broken ribs and very bad spinal injuries. The doctors say that it's touch and go whether he'll ever be able to walk again. We went to have a look at the place where he had fallen, his rucksack was still there, he's damn lucky to be alive. Do you know, Dan Cartwright had carried him nearly three miles. We couldn't get much out of him, particularly in his present condition, but apparently he was trying to get the boy home. Of course the lad was the instigator of the whole thing, and as soon as he had the accident, Cartwright's only thought was to get him back.'

'Yes, it's a bad business, shows what rumour can do. When the gossip once starts there is no end to it. How is Cartwright?'

'He'll be all right. The doctor said that he needn't even be kept in hospital. Mind you sir, those thugs gave him a real going over—nose broken, teeth knocked out—his face is a right mess. And two fingers broken on one hand, but nothing to cause any permanent damage.'

'Has his mother seen him yet?'

'Yes she's in there with him now. I didn't tell her how it happened, just that he'd been injured. She thinks that he fell at the same time as the boy. You know sir, I'd like to deal with that bunch of hooligans myself. I bet every

one of them has a record, a worse collection of specimens I've never seen. . . .'

'I know,' the chief interrupted, 'I saw them down at the station. Have you charged them yet?'

'No sir, I came straight here.'

'Good.' The chief looked straight at Paully. 'We'll have to let them go you know.'

'What, after what they've done; beating up that poor harmless goon who wouldn't even swat a fly!'

'Yes, I know that it goes against the grain, but after all, officially they were assisting the police.' The chief began to pace up and down. 'They were in the search party, and if they were charged, what would their defence be?'—he answered the question himself—'That they thought he was a murderer, that they thought he had attacked the boy, and that they were trying to prevent him from escaping.'

'But sir. . . .'

'Think, sergeant, think.' The chief stopped pacing the room and stood facing Paully. 'This case is dead now as far as the press are concerned, just another murder. An everyday affair. If he'd murdered half a dozen, things might have been different, but as it is I doubt whether the trial will rate more than half a column in the nationals. Charge this crew though, and the papers will soon start raking up the muck again. Before you knew it, they would be saying that we were chasing the wrong man, while the real culprit came in and confessed. They would soon forget that it was themselves who practically convicted Cartwright in the first place, and they wouldn't bother to mention that Harry Morgan only confessed after a detective had questioned his housekeeper—as a result of a nice little bit of deduction on your part.' The chief leaned forward urgently. 'If I thought it would do any real good, I'd have them charged, but I honestly don't think it would. A clever man might get them off, and even if they were found guilty, what would it be? You know we round up gangs like that every

Saturday night, and all that happens is that they get fined a few quid and go off feeling like big heroes. Now what about it lad. Why not let it out that Cartwright was injured in the fall, at the same time as the boy? I doubt whether he will ever say what really happened.'

'Well if you say so sir,' Paully agreed hesitantly.

'I do say so lad—when you reach my age, you will realize the value of discretion in these matters. We'll just let things stand as they are at present, while we take credit for catching the real murderer. After all, we did get him pretty quick at that.' The chief patted Paully's shoulder. 'Why risk having mud slung at us when we could be having feathers put in our caps?'

'Yes sir.' Paully supposed that the chief was right. He was always easily talked round, too ready to see the other person's point of view.

'That's the idea. Now then, you must have had a long day out there and I suppose you want to go home to wash and change. I haven't told you the details about Harry Morgan's confession yet, so perhaps you'd care to drop in at my house for dinner later on? Then over one or two drinks I'll fill in the blanks for you—I think we deserve a drink or two eh?'

'Thank you sir, I should be very glad to.'

'Well then, pop round about eight o'clock. I'll deal with those five hooligans. I'll let them stew for a while and then give them a real shaking before letting them loose. Oh and I'll collect a copy of Morgan's statement from the station, and you can have a look at it after dinner. It will interest you.' The chief shook his head. 'You know, it's an odd case, I can't for the life of me think why the fellow did it. Right, you cut along then and I'll see you at eight.'

The chief watched Paully as he walked down the hall. He liked the lad. Keen and alert, good solid stuff. He was the sort who would put a bit of backbone in the force. A different cut of the cake altogether from Inspector Aldwych. The chief wondered whether it might not be better if

Paully took the inspector's place, Paully was young for it, but with himself there to lend a guiding hand. . . . Of course, it would mean having Aldwych promoted to get him out of the way without any fuss. A pity, but worth it. They needed a new man in the traffic division, Chief-Inspector Arkwright hadn't been replaced. With the chief's recommendation. . . .

Outside, Paully walked down the infirmary steps, feeling very pleased with himself. The chief of all people, inviting him round to dinner like that. He wasn't a bad fellow at all, the chief wasn't, when you got to know him. Aldwych had always let on that he was a holy terror, but then Aldwych and the chief had never got on.

Paully laughed to himself as he thought about Aldwych. The story of the inspector's second fall had soon reached the division, and Paully had heard about it before setting out in the morning. You couldn't help laughing, although it wasn't so funny for poor old Alfred.

Paully hopped on a bus at the corner. He went upstairs and lit a cigarette. He felt very comfortable, pleasantly tired after the long tramp over the moors. He was looking forward to having a hot bath before putting on his best suit and going round to the chief's. He hoped that he had a clean shirt.

He stretched out his legs as well as he could in the confined space between the seats. The chief seemed to think a lot of him. He wondered whether it might mean early promotion. He was a bit young, even for a sergeant, but so what? He had taken over Aldwych's work and shown that he could handle it, and with the chief on his side. . . .

Paully was courting a girl whom he had met on holiday. she lived at the other end of the country, so they couldn't often see each other, but they were sure of their feelings, and were both saving up to get married. With the extra money Paully would make as an inspector, they wouldn't have to wait so long.

Paully closed his eyes and smiled to himself. He wondered whether she would like hiking. . . .

Detective Inspector Aldwych was sitting miserably in front of the fire with his injured foot up on a pouffe. His wife was sitting opposite him, perched on the edge of the chair. Every few seconds she would leap to her feet and wipe an imaginary speck of dust off some immaculate surface. She always had a duster in her hand, like a weapon, ready to defend her spotless, gleaming, uncomfortable house against attack by dirt. She was always on the move, eternally tidying. Three times she had emptied his ashtray, while he had been smoking one cigarette, and now, she was watching like a prehensile bird, ready to pounce again as soon as he stubbed out the butt.

'I don't know how they've been able to manage without you at that police station,' she said. She began to polish one of the brass wall plaques over the fireplace. The one that said: 'Trust not him that seems a saint.'

'How do you mean love?' Aldwych asked.

'All that extra duty that you've been doing every night and day. You were never at home—it must take at least three men to do as much work as you did.'

'They'll manage somehow,' Aldwych said. He watched as a coal fell out of the fire. His wife had the coal back in the grate and the hearth swept up and dusted in no time. He looked at the row of china horses on the mantelpiece and thought longingly about that 'extra duty'.

'Have you read in the evening paper about Harry Morgan?'

'Haven't had time to open it yet. What about him?' Bert Tatlers asked as he pumped the customer his usual glass of mild beer.

'They've arrested him for that murder—it's there, in the stop press.' The man handed the evening paper across the bar and pointed to the brief item, with a grubby finger.

'Get away!' Bert Tatlers put on a pair of antiquated spectacles and slowly read aloud: "'A local shopkeeper—Harry Morgan—was charged earlier this afternoon with the recent murder of a twenty-four-year-old girl in Hall Wood, Barlow Bridge.'" He took his spectacles off. 'Fancy! Mind you, I can't say that I'm really surprised, he's been behaving very peculiar ever since, and I could never really believe that it was Dan Cartwright. I wonder why he did it though?'

'We'll probably find out when they put him on trial.' The customer leaned on the bar, looking at Bert. 'Here it were your barmaid and all weren't it?'

'That's right, I'll have to see about replacing her and all—been worked off my feet these past few days.'

'Been kept busy have you?'

'Aye, I must say that it's all been very good for trade.' Bert Tatlers looked out of the window. 'Looks as if it's coming on to rain again, as if we haven't had enough today.'

Dan Cartwright lay in bed at home, looking at a picture book, turning the pages slowly and clumsily with one hand, the other was bandaged up and strapped across his chest in a sling. His mother sat on the edge of the bed watching him. All the way home in the ambulance he hadn't said anything, he hadn't spoken at all except to say hello, when he'd first seen her at the hospital.

She looked at him as he turned the pages of the book. Usually he made noises when he was looking at pictures, but tonight he was strangely quiet, and it was a new book too that Fred had gone out to get specially.

His poor face, all battered like that, it must have been a terrible fall. And poor Johnny Starter's back broke. He'd be in the hospital for a long time they had said, and then he would have to go to another place, where he would learn to walk again.

Mrs Cartwright and Dan were alone in the house. Betty

was out at the pictures with her boy friend and Fred had a meeting to attend.

Fred had wanted to stop at home and keep her company, but she had said no to his offer. It was best the way it was, just she and Dan. She could look after him better on her own, the same as she had all those years before, when he'd had the meningitis. He was her son and she would get him well again.

She watched him turning the pages. It would soon be time for her to get him a bit of supper, then after he had eaten it, she would put the light out and stay with him until Fred came home. By that time he should have fallen asleep.

Harry Morgan was gently ushered into the cold yard at the rear of Rutledge Central Police Station. Dazed, he shivered in the cold drizzle, but hardly noticed the chill. The elderly policeman who had brought him from the cell steered him towards the black van from Manchester. The rear door was open and a pale-eyed, spectacled man in uniform was sitting on the running board. He looked curiously at Harry, his eyes blinking. He took Harry's other arm and together he and the policeman helped him into the van. The elderly policeman stepped down from the van as a second guard came round from the front to close the door and lock it. He pocketed the keys and walked round to the front again.

'Cheerio.'

'Cheerio.'

The van started up and the elderly policeman watched as it pulled out of the station yard and swung into the main road heading for Manchester.

The elderly policeman blew on his hands and walked back into the warmth of the station.

DAN STEPPED silently out of the house, so as not to disturb his sister while she was playing her gram.

Huge, slow and stolid, he peered up and down, his eyes watchful beneath the thick black brows that garnished the monotonous expanse of his pale, vacant face.

He bit his lip, and strode up the three steps that led from the diminutive garden, with its stunted privets, up to the rough, cobbled village street. The street that had retained its character for over a hundred years. Laid down when the mines were active and the ironworks was still functioning. Before the iron works shut up and the coal seams ran out, leaving no need for it to be re-laid to meet the needs of the modern traffic which would never come to Barlow Bridge.

So the street remained the same, its worn cobbles black and shiny, polished by clog irons until they were as smooth as so many cannon balls.

Dan turned left to where the street became a lane that wound out of the valley, past the Goose Pond and Forty Row, past Hall Wood and the housing estate, where Johnny Starter had used to live before they sent him away.

Dan paused for a while at the Goose Pond. It was spring, and there would be tadpoles in the green, stagnant water. Tiny, wriggling brownish black creatures which Dan could catch in his hands, and if he held them long enough they would stop wriggling, and when he put them back into the water, they wouldn't swim off under the weeds again, but would float on the surface where he could see them and touch them again if he wanted to.

On his way back he would climb over the fence and have

a look. It wouldn't matter then if he got his boots muddied. But he was going to the pub now, and he liked to be spruce when he went into the pub.

The pub where all the men would be and Eileen the barmaid, with her long dark hair and her soft hands. Dan had felt her hand once. He had touched it as she was serving him a drink. Her whole body was soft like her hands, soft and warm. Dan knew. One day she had brushed against him as she squeezed through the crowded bar. It had made him feel very strange, like when Nat Kershaw had shown him the pictures in the magazine and like when he'd come downstairs late at night for a drink of water and seen his sister washing her body. One day he hoped that Eileen might brush past him again like that and that he might be able to touch her long hair.

Dan walked on to the end of the estate, where the lane joined the main road into Rutledge.

At the end of the lane were the bus terminal and the bench where the old men sat, static in a row, their faces white. Only their eyes alive, keen and dancing in the dark and wrinkled pits, and their hands twitching aimlessly in their laps.

Dan walked past them into the pub.

The bell over the door clattered as it closed behind him and he turned into the public bar.

'Morning Dan,' said Bert Tatlers, the landlord. 'What'll it be, same as usual?'

He reached for a clean glass and waited expectantly, one plump hand on the mild pump.

Dan fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and brought out the sixpence which his mother had given to him.

'Glass of mild please.' He pushed the sixpence towards the landlord, but it was Eileen that he was watching. Eileen plump in her tight, red dress, her head thrown back and her breasts taut as she laughed and exchanged jokes with the men she was serving further down the bar.

When the landlord had given him his drink, Dan took

it over to the table in the corner, had one sip and set it down in front of him. He sat there still watching Eileen, gnawing his fingernail. There was some beer spilled on the table and with his other hand—the one with the three crooked fingers—he idly traced a pattern in the sticky liquid, a clumsy caricature of the naked female form, the way he had seen it in the pictures in Nat Kershaw's magazines. . . .

On his way home, Dan stopped and climbed the fence by the Goose Pond. In the grass, half concealed, he found a bird's nest. In it were four fledgeling birds, beaks gaping wide, impatient, hungry, waiting for the mother bird to come and feed them.

Dan looked down at the four tiny creatures.

Slowly he raised his foot and brought it down on the nest, feeling it crush beneath the steady pressure of his heavy boot. Again and again he raised his foot and brought it down, until only a congealed mass of blood and feathers, crushed leaves and straw marred the spring green grass.

Dan looked down at his boot. Some of the pulp had been picked up by the hobnails in the sole. He bent down, scraped some off with his finger and sucked it curiously.

It was warm.

Dan climbed back over the fence and walked on. His dinner would be waiting. Occasionally, he stopped, bent down, scraped some more of the stuff off his boot and licked his finger clean. As he turned the final corner of the lane and walked under the iron bridge, up the cobbled street towards the little house, he could hear his sister's gram playing.

Somewhere behind a skylark sang.

